The Bride of an Evening

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Willoughby.

William B. Cairns Collection

of

American Women Writers

1630–1900

William B. Cairns

Professor of English

University of Wisconsin-Madison

Digitized by Google

Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

THE BRIDE OF AN EVENING.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

THE

BRIDE OF AN EVENING;

OR,

THE GIPSY'S PROPHECY.

By MRS. SOUTHWORTH.

AUTHOR OF "THE BRIDE'S FATE," "THE CHANGED BRIDES," "THE FATAL MARRIAGE," "THE BRIDAL EVE," "WINNY DARLING," &C., &C.

LONDON:
W. NICHOLSON & SONS,
26, PATERNOSTER SQUARE, E.C.,
AND ALBION WORKS, WAKEFIELD.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

RARE BOOK DEPT.
Cairns Collection
PS
2892
E7
1850

CONTENTS.

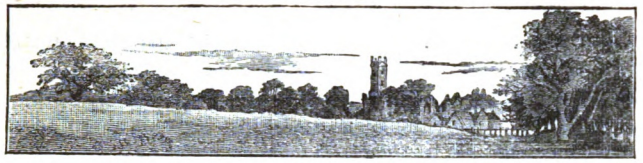
CHAP.		PAGE.
I.	The Derby Day	7
II.	Love at First Sight	20
III.	An Introduction to the Beloved	29
IV.	Mysterious Predictions	34
V.	An Agreeable Change of Residence	43
VI.	No Respecter of Persons	48
VII.	Telling Fortunes by Cards	56
VIII.	A Wealthy Rival Rejected	64
IX.	The Declaration of Love	67
X.	Success in Business	71
XI.	The Rich Old Man's Relenting	78
XII.	Murder of Hugh Horne	85
XIII.	The Wedding Day	90
XIV.	Painful Arrest at a Marriage Feast	96
XV.	Breaking the Sad News to the Bride	102
XVI.	The Bride and Bridegroom in Jail	110
XVII.	The Prisoner before the Magistrate	121
XVIII.	The Faithful Bride	131
XIX.	The Trial at the Assizes	143
XX.	The Sentence of Death	153
XXI.	Expecting Execution	165
XXII.	A Respite upon certain conditions	171
XXIII.	The Night before the Execution	183
XXIV.	A Respite at the Last Moment	190
XXV.	A Secret of the Confessional	199
XXVI.	A Second Love-Match	210
XXVII.	A Villainous Doctor	216
XXVIII.	Alice arrested for Theft	222
XXIX.	Alice before the Magistrate	234
XXX.	Alice in Prison	241
XXXI.	A Friend in Need	246

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

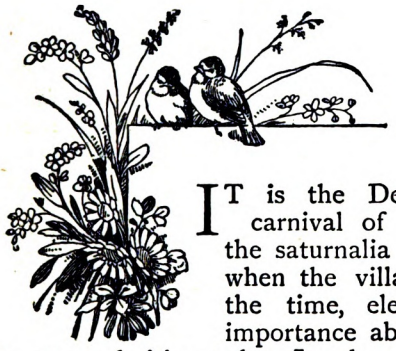
CHAP.		PAGE.
XXXII.	—The Effect of Suspicion	252
XXXIII.	—A Marriage by License	258
XXXIV.	—An Infamous Proposal	268
XXXV.	—Death of Mrs. Horne	273
XXXVI.	—Alice's Trial for Theft at the Assizes ...	280
XXXVII.	—"Guilty!"	284
XXXVIII.	—Supposed Death in the Prison Cell ...	290
XXXIX.	—A Case of Catalepsy	301
XL.	—Bound to Secrecy	310
XLI.	—The Midnight Journey	318
XLII.	—Mysterious Disappearance of Alice ...	326
XLIII.	—Is it Somnambulism?	334
XLIV.	—Following the Sleep-walker	344
XLV.	—Remorse of Conscience	347
XLVI.	—The Haunted Chamber	355
XLVII.	—A Committee of Investigation	361
XLVIII.	—Confession of Dr. Horne.—The Innocent Liberated	369

Digitized by Google

Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN



THE BRIDE OF AN EVENING.



CHAPTER I.

THE DERBY DAY.

IT is the Derby day—the great carnival of Protestant England; the saturnalia of free-born Britons; when the village of Epsom is, for the time, elevated into supreme importance above all other villages, towns, and cities; when London, Paris, and St. Petersburg are nothing and nowhere, and Epsom is all in all—the capital of England, the metropolis of the world, the centre of the solar system, the centripetal power of all animated nature, and of all civilized life, attracting all surrounding creation with irresistible force to itself.

It is the day when horse-jockeys are mightier than monarchs, and horses a higher order of being than man; when all questions of merely human or national interest are crowded out by the one all-engrossing subject of thought and conversation; when our relations with France, the condition of India, the income-tax, the change of ministry, are the merest trifles beside the absorbing question of—

"Who is to win the Derby?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

The Emperor Napoleon may be the greatest statesman of the age, with an inscrutable purpose that we would be glad to discover, but he is not the winning horse to-day, and though his dark policy may be big with the fate of Europe, it is not fraught with the destinies of the Derby. India is a subject of anxious importance; but after all India is not Epsom. Direct and indirect taxation are troublesome questions, but they have nothing to do with our sweepstakes. So, to the land of shadows with all these subjects; for one day the Derby is everything, and everything else is nothing.

Epsom Heath, on the Derby day, is a scene impossible to conceive by those who have never seen it. It is a concentrated quintessence of the world with all its passions and objects, its hopes and fears, its loves and hatreds, its jealousies and rivalries, its joys and sorrows, its disappointments and triumph. It is a vast collection of all that is most exciting and most depressing, most delightful, and most distressing in civilized life. Here on Epsom Heath and Hill are gathered together a great multitude of people, that in its vastness and incongruity reminds one of another day, for another purpose, when the only distinction of rank will be the simple and the final one that separates for ever the evil from the good. Here are brought together all ranks, from that of royalty down through every intermediate grade, to the beggar who wanders listlessly about, scarcely hoping to gather from this joyous crowd, the poor boon of a penny or a crust.

The hill is covered with hundreds of open barouches, filled with splendidly attired ladies and gentlemen, all in gay conversation and eager anticipation of the great race of the day. All the heath, between the hill and the race-course, is mottled over with vehicles of every possible description, from the brougham of the gentleman to the donkey-cart of the costermonger, and with booths, and apple-stalls, gipsy-tents and professors of every art and imposition, from thimble-rig to fortune-telling. But the most exciting object of the whole scene, is the grand stand where the betters are making

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

up their books—where those haggard men who stake their whole fortunes upon the wind and limb of untried horses, know that in another hour they must be enriched or ruined. Outside the race-course the ground for miles around is still covered with a vast concourse of men, women, and children, horses, dogs, and donkeys, carriages, carts, and waggons, booths, stalls, and tents. Beyond this outer circle, every leading highway is thronged miles deep with more men, women, and children, more horses, dogs, and donkeys, and more carriages, carts, and waggons, all pressing on towards the scene of action, all blockading each other at the turnpike-gates, and cheering or swearing at each other as they crush past. But it is not with the toil, turbulence, and noise of these *radii* of the outer circles that we have to do, but with the very centre itself—with the cool, airy, commanding hill, covered, but not crowded, with hundreds of open barouches and their fair occupants. On one of the best front sites upon this hill, and between the two coronetted carriages, stood a large, clean, substantial brake, a thing more convenient for its present purpose than any other sort of carriage could possibly be. This brake was occupied by a family party which seemed to consist of a father and four handsome daughters, but was in reality a bachelor uncle and four nieces. Three of these were large, blonde girls, showily dressed and full of talk and laughter. The fourth was smaller and darker, of a more elegant figure and plainer garb. She sat beside her uncle on the back seat, and while her companions chattered and giggled with girlish gaiety, she surveyed the scene around her with grave thoughtfulness.

The old man, after roaring aloud at some flippant speech of one of the young ladies, suddenly turned to his silent niece, and said—

"Well, my dear Constance, what do you think of the Derby, eh? How serious you are! I hope those highly respectable old ladies at Brussels haven't turned you into a sort of Protestant nun, have they? You don't answer. Come, what do you think of the Derby, eh?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"In truth, more than I can tell you at once, uncle," replied the young girl.

"Gay, dashing, inspiring scene, isn't it, eh? Can't be beat in the world—the Derby. Why, girl, look around you. People from all quarters of the globe come here just to see the Derby; not only from all parts of Europe, but from across seas, from America: and your cousins here, the plagues of my life, wouldn't miss the Derby-day for a set of rare diamonds. Fine, joyous, enlivening scene. Don't you think so, eh, Constance, my little novice?"

"Very joyous for Dives, very sorrowful for Lazarus," murmured Constance, in a low, thoughtful voice, as her eyes rested upon a magnificent barouche on their left, where a splendidly arrayed party were regaling themselves upon a sumptuous luncheon, served by liveried footmen, while around and under the carriage crawled three half-naked and half-starved boys, literally gathering up the crusts and bones that fell from the banquet above, and gnawing them with the voracity of famished wolves.

And this striking modern illustration of Dives and Lazarus was repeated in and around every barouche where the millionaire feasted and the starving grovelled. This was one of the sights of the Derby. It was very painful to unaccustomed eyes, and those of Constance filled with tears. Those of Colonel North were hardened by habit, but even they twinkled to conceal a little moisture, as he said—

"Yes, yes, my dear Constance, I know it looks very sad; but God bless your tender heart, it isn't near so sad as it looks! Even those little wretches are the happier for the Derby-day. They admire all the glory, mingle with all the excitement, have an opinion as to which is to be the winning horse, and get up a ha'penny sweepstake among themselves, no doubt! aye, and are the better for those luxurious banquets which contrast so painfully with their starvation; for if there were no feasts in the barouche for Dives there would be no sweet crusts and rich bones on the ground for Lazarus. And that reminds me that everyone else being at lunch,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

it is quite time for us to begin ours, if we mean to finish it before the horses start for the Derby. As for myself, I am so sharp set I could eat a crocodile! What the deuce are we waiting for, girls?"

"For Lord Starr and Captain Starr, who promised to join us, you know, uncle," said the eldest Miss Horton.

"Oh, aye, yes to be sure; where can they be? at the betting-ring I do suppose, deep in their betting-books; no, by Jove, here they come, the captain with the trophies of Aunt Sally adorning his hat. David, you villain! David, you lazy loon, where are you? Come, serve up! serve up!"

The "lazy loon" thus adjured, came forward from behind the brake, bearing aloft a huge hamper, which he deposited within the vehicle before his master. The hamper was speedily unpacked of its contents, consisting first of a small service of china, glass, silver, cutlery, and napkins, and next of a Westphalian ham, a pair of roast fowls, a pigeon pie, a salad, condiments, tarts, jellies, cakes, fruits, and wines—in a word, of provisions enough to dine a large party sumptuously; for Colonel North always came provided to lunch at least half a dozen bachelor friends in addition to his own circle. As the viands were taken out and deposited about as the capabilities of the roomy brake permitted, two gentlemen walked up, and lifting their hats, saluted our party.

The elder, a tall, fine-looking man of fifty, was cordially greeted by the colonel and the three young ladies, and then formally presented to Constance as—

"Lord Starr, of Starr Court, in Hampshire."

Lord Starr bowed profoundly.

Constance half arose and slightly curtsied.

This, I may say, is my niece Constance's *début* in the world! Singular scene for a young lady's first appearance! but the fact is I have just brought her from her school in Brussels, where she has been passing the last five years; and I thought before taking her home to Llyndell, I would just stop a day or two in London to bring her to the Derby. I telegraphed for her cousins to join us, and here they are, and here *we* are," said

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Colonel North, jovially. Lord Starr bowed again, and expressed his satisfaction in making her acquaintance. The younger was an *élégante* of some twenty-two years, who was presented as—

"Captain Starr, of the Horse Gaurds."

"Come in, come in, gentlemen! there is plenty of room in our brake, in which matter it has a decided advantage over the finer-looking carriages around us. Come in; it is ill standing to feed!" said the colonel, heartily.

But Lord Starr and the young guardsman excused themselves, and declared that they preferred standing, where they could attend upon the ladies, whom they could by no means be induced to incommode by entering the brake. Meanwhile plates, knives, napkins, and glasses, were distributed, and the business of lunching commenced in earnest. The conversation of course turned upon the prospective winning horse, and equally of course everyone knew which that was to be—the favourite, "Annihilator," and no other. Everyone agreed to this; that is, everyone except Miss Fanny Horton, who, as she picked a pigeon-wing, laid down the law as follows:

"Well! I am not learned in horsey lore, as you gentlemen of the turf are expected to be, but this one thing I have noticed in my last ten years' annual visits to the Derby——"

"Ten years, Miss Fanny!" ejaculated Lord Starr, with a flattering incredulity.

"Yes, ten years, sir; I am getting on the old maid's list, Lord Starr.

"My dear Miss Fanny, I am shocked! But, upon my honour, I assure you that it is no fault of mine," said his lordship, bowing.

"Nor of mine, 'pon my soul!" echoed Captain Starr.

"Nor of *hers*, I'll engage to say! Eh, Fan! Ha, ha, ha!" chuckled her uncle.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Miss Fanny, blushing. "I was about to say, for your instruction, that in the ten years that I have been visiting the Derby—namely, from the time I was ten years old, when I saw my first

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

race, to the present day, when I am waiting to see this, I never knew the favourite horse to win the Derby! There, that is the fruit of my tree of knowledge! so that I would take any horse at a venture, and bet on him in preference to the favourite one!"

All present seemed quite struck with the acuteness of Miss Fanny's observation, which they immediately began to compare with their own experiences, when their attention was called off by the appearance of the wretched boys, who, having gleaned all they could get from the left-hand barouche, now came shily towards the brake, and began looking down on the ground, with hungry eyes, in search of bones and crusts. Our party had finished their meal, and David had received orders to clear away, when Colonel North, catching sight of these hungry little vagrants, called out—

"Here, David! give me that hamper a moment."

David restored the hamper to its place, and his master plunged his hand down into it, fished up a pigeon pie, and bending over the brake, called the hungry boys, saying—"Here, little fellows! take this, and get under the brake to eat it!"

Three pair of little hands seized the incredible prize, and three starved little figures popped down under the carriage to devour it. How like ravenous wolves they ate! They were soon joined by three or four other little Arabs of their tribe, and a squabble commenced over the remains of the pasty.

"Good Lord?" exclaimed uncle John, as he plunged his hand once more in the hamper, and fished up a roast fowl—"Here you Bohemians! stop clapper-clawing each other, and divide this among you!"

Half a dozen pair of claws seized the fowl, which was quickly torn to pieces among them.

"Saints in glory! was ever anything like it! Here, you small Philistines!" And Colonel North dived once more into the hamper, and handed down the Westphalian ham and a loaf of bread, which were seized and disposed of as were the others.

"'Angels and ministers of grace defend us!' I say girls, they will eat us all up, body and bones! men,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

women, and brake!" exclaimed the colonel in dismay, as he plunged once more into the hamper, and brought up a bundle of sandwiches. But here old David pulled such a long and lugubrious face, that the eldest Miss Horton laid her hand firmly upon the bundle, and said—

"No, no, uncle John! 'justice before generosity!' don't give the last morsel away! Remember David has not had his dinner yet."

"David? *David* quo' she? Let David dine on bread and cheese for once in a way; it will do him good!" And over went the sandwiches among the little sharks. And down dropped David's jaw in consternation.

"David! David! there is still half a pigeon pie and half a roast fowl left in the hamper, run away with it while times are good," said Miss Horton. And David lost no time in obeying.

Colonel North had no opportnnity of objecting, for just at this moment an universal excitement moved the vast multitude, as the wind moves the leaves of a great forest, and the words went around—

"They are about to start!" repeated at the same instant by many thousand voices.

Every one stood up in breathless excitement. All necks were stretched, and all eyes turned towards the starting point. Another instant and a cry went up from that great multitude—

"They're off! They're off!"

And they are off—some twenty or thirty horses—the best of all three-year-old colts in the whole civilized world! They come! They come! they rush on! urged by their jockeys in green caps, red caps, yellow caps, blue caps, all caps!

Oh, heaven! what an interval of thrilling suspense! Fifty thousand people are on their feet, breathless, eager, expectant! There, on the grand stand, are men who have staked their all upon this race, with faces like those of maniacs—pale, haggard, anxious, agonized—another minute will enrich or ruin them. Not a word is spoken amid the breathless multitude. The horses

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

rush on and on, like a whirlwind, sublime in their irresistible might! And now the breathless silence is broken by shouts of—

"Annihilator's ahead!"

"Invincible's past him!"

"Fleetfoot is first!"

When suddenly an ordinary-looking, unnoticed horse behind shoots forward, passes the field, and is first in by half the length of his body. A groan from one half the multitude! Dead silence, and the collapse of despair from the other. A few knowing men had made their fortunes. Many were utterly ruined and desperate.

A low, half-suppressed cry was heard from the splendid coronetted carriage on the left of our brake. The loveliest woman in that bevy of lovely women had fainted.

"It is the Countess Ainslie; she had staked seventy thousand pounds on Annihilator, and has lost all," whispered a voice near.

Aye! she has lost seventy thousand pounds on the Derby! But that was not all. She lost her husband, who never forgave the *unsuccessful* error! She lost her host of summer friends, who hastened to forsake the impoverished and discarded wife! And she lost her own young life, which in a few months after sunk broken-hearted to the grave!

There was a rushing of men towards the grand stand.

"What is the matter?" inquired Colonel North of a policeman.

"Captain Trentham has blown his brains out; he lost a round hundred thousand on the favourite," answered the policeman.

And these catastrophes passed as matters of course in the madness of the Derby Day!

"Whose horse won? What was the name of the winning horse?" were the next questions heard all over the ground. Every one referred to their card, but no one could tell until the figure was up. Then the ten thousand voices exclaimed at once—

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Mr. Jones's Muff! who would have thought it!"

Aye! who *would* have thought it? Who would have thought that the 'little corporal' ever would have been Emperor of France and half the rest of the world? Nevertheless, the little corporal *did*, in the year eighteen hundred and four, found a dynasty, and Mr. Jones's Muff *did*, in eighteen hundred and something, win the Derby! And both are immortalized. The great interest of the day was over; but there were some two or three minor races to be run, and people were too much excited to go home: so though the royal party withdrew, the multitude remained to see it all out. Lord Starr and Captain Starr, lifting their hats, bade adieu to our party, and departed to see how their friends of the betting-ring were sustaining their misfortunes or triumphs; and Colonel North was left alone with his nieces, to listen to the exultation of Miss Fanny, who crowed loudly over the fact that her theory of races was proved, in that Muff, the insignificant horse, had confounded human wisdom on the turf by winning the Derby. Meanwhile Constance, whose feelings had been profoundly moved by all that she had seen and heard, sat back in deep thought, that was at length interrupted by a well modulated voice, close to her ear, saying—

"Tell your fortune, sweet lady?"

Constance started, and looked up to behold at her elbow one of those gipsy crones that infest all public gatherings to pick up silver by telling fortunes. Constance was about to decline the offer, when three fair hands were suddenly extended, and three eager voices exclaimed—

"Tell mine! tell mine! tell mine, gipsy!"

"One at a time, pretty dears," said the old gipsy, leaving the side of Constance and coming around to that of Miss Horton.

In turn she scanned the palms of the three fair sisters, and in turn, and with little variation in her story, she promised them the blessings supposed to be craved by young ladies, and which, indeed, their own blooming faces might have partly insured, namely

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

—rich husbands, fine children, and long lives; promises which the laughing girls declared were purchased cheaply at half-a-crown each.

"And now," said the gipsy, whose voice and smile were like a benediction, "I want to tell that sweet lady's fortune."

"No, no," said Constance, shrinking from her.

"Aye, but I do! Sweet lady, I read strange matter written on your brow," persisted the gipsy, fixing her black eyes upon the face of Constance, who shuddered, she knew not why, as she said—

"Oh, pray go away! There is a crown for you."

"Nay, but, sweet lady, let the old gipsy cross your palm with this broad piece, that she may read and warn you of the ill fate that threatens, and the sure way to avoid it."

The dark, wild beauty of the gipsy's face, and the earnestness of her manner, impressed Constance even against her own reason and judgment. She trembled as he answered—

"You are in the habit of prophecying 'smooth things' to your customers. Why do you speak of an ill fate to me?"

"Lady, the awful hand of Fate has written that upon your brow which I would interpret by the lines of your hand."

"Oh, pray do not; pray leave me; if you possess the art of foretelling the future it is sinful to exercise it; if you do not, it is still more sinful to pretend to it," said Constance.

"It is no pretence, lady! Ages before the time when your Mosaic record dates the creation of the world, the ancient fathers of our wandering tribes were entrusted with the great mystery of knowing the future as the past. This dower has come down to us through countless ages. And we, wanderers over the face of the earth, who have lost all things else, have retained our awful gift. It is dimmed, weakened, and impaired in these latter days, but not utterly extinct. Still we can read on your brow, and in your eyes, no less than

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

in the lines of your hand, the future that Fate has inscribed there!" said the gipsy, solemnly.

"Then, if you really have this power, it is a great sin to exercise it, as I said before," replied Constance, gravely.

"Nay, sweet lady, it is not a sin to use any faculty with which the Creator has endowed us."

"Come, come!" here broke in Colonel North, who had been impatiently watching this scene; "tramp off! tramp off! you annoy the young lady needlessly; her fortune is already richly told!"

"Aye, it is *written* but not *read!*" said the gipsy.

Constance, to end the scene, held out her hand, saying,—

"There, read what you find there."

The gipsy took and carefully scrutinized the palm exposed to her view; and as she gazed upon it, her own dark and eloquent face became convulsed as by some agonizing emotion. She dropped the hand of the girl, and gazed mournfully into her face.

"Well," said Constance, "what do you read?"

"Lady, I cannot, dare not read aloud the awful lines that Fate has written on your hand," said the gipsy, gazing fixedly upon the face of her whom she had now completely magnetized.

"Gipsy," said Constance, bending forward, and speaking in a low, breathless tone, "I know not how much or how little you may really possess of that awful gift you claim, but I am now willing to test it. Gipsy, all my life I have been haunted by one dark presentiment. Tell me, what form does my presentiment take?"

The gipsy bent and whispered in her ear *one word.*

Constance started and turned deadly pain.

"*Now* do you believe in my gift?" inquired the Sibyl.

"I know not what to believe. But tell me, will my fatal presentiment be fulfilled?"

"It depends upon yourself."

"Upon myself?"

"Yes; Fate is never so absolute but that she leaves an alternative to her victim."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Explain. How may I avoid the fulfilment of my dark presentiment?"

"*Love not!*"

"Love not?"

"Love *never!* Choose the half-life of perpetual maidenhood; so shall that half-life flow on calmly if not happily, to its bourne in the ocean of eternity. But if on the other hand, you *love*—"

"Well?"

"You will be loved again! passionately! devotedly! without measure!"

"Surely that would be a happy fate; what next?"

"You will be wedded to him whom you love and by whom you are beloved."

"A happier fate—what next?"

"You would be a bride; but——"

"Well?"

"Never a wife!—"

"Ah!"

"For between the nuptial benediction and the bridal chamber shall arise the dark form of the—scaffold!"

A half-suppressed shriek burst from the lips of Constance; but controlling her emotions, she bade the Sybil proceed.

"Lady, I have but little more to say; I have read the future for you, and I have shown you the alternatives of fate; choose for yourself. A few days will decide your destiny. A few days will show whether your life is to be a long and calm monotony, or whether it is to be a brief fever, lightened by transient joy, and darkened by fatal sorrow! A few days and a stranger, who is not quite a stranger, will cross your path. Lady! if you would have long and tranquil days, speak not to him; look not on him; turn your back on him; fly as for life, and fling not a glance behind!"

And so saying the gipsy glided away. Colonel North, who had meanwhile been busy making up the sweepstakes for the next race, now turned and called upon Constance to stake her sovereign, and draw her number. Constance mechanically declined, for her thoughts were, despite her reason, engaged with the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

gipsy's prophecy. And after the next race, in which Colonel North won the sweepstakes, the party left the race-course, and, by slow stages, through crowded and noisy highways, proceeded to London, where, over a comfortable supper at their hotel, they forgot the fatigues of the road. And next morning the whole party left town for Wales.

CHAPTER II.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.

THE locality of our story lies amid one of the wildest and most picturesque regions of South Wales, where the head waters of the Rhai river rise amid the Oloff Hills. The precise spot, Crucis, is a sublime and beautiful scene, where two wooded ranges of hills cross each other at oblique angles. At the intersecting point of these ridges stands a little ancient chapel, called St. Andrew's Church, and around the chapel nestles a little hamlet, named, from its elevated position, Bleakton. At the period at which our story opens, the four estates, in the four angles of the irregular mountain cross, were owned as follows:—

The eastern one, called Llyndell, was the life property of Mrs. Horton, a lady of the old school. The western, and most valuable one, was the inheritance of Miss Wynne, an orphan heiress, grand-daughter and ward of Mrs. Horton.

The northern and smallest one, called, from being the deepest vale of the four, Horne's Hole, was the property of old Hugh Horne, a widower, of gloomy temper, parsimonious habits, and almost fabulous wealth. The southern one, named, from the extravagant cost of the elegant mansion-house, elaborate out-buildings, and highly-ornamented grounds, which had absorbed the means of the late owner, "Radnor's Ruin," was the heavily-mortgaged patrimony of Gerald Ross Mostyn, the grandson of Mr. Horne, and now a young aspirant

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

for honours at the University of Oxford. But little benefit to the heir was to be hoped from the inheritance of his father's burthened property. In the first place, old Hugh Horne had bought up in his own name all the claims against the estate of Radnor's Ruin, doubtless to prevent a foreclosure, and to save the property for his grandson. But unhappily, Gerald had mortally offended the despotic old man, by declining an agricultural life, and persisting in the study of a profession—a course that had resulted in his own disinheritance. To make this punishment more bitter to his grandson the old man had taken into favour his nephew, Mr. James Horne, whom he had established near himself at Radnor's Ruin. At this time, the disinherited heir, having finished a term at the university, had come down to spend a part of his vacation in his native place. As no hospitable mansion was likely to be thrown open to the almost penniless young student, he also received "his warmest welcome in an inn." It was upon the Saturday evening of his arrival that he found the little hotel, and, indeed, the whole village of Bleakton, in a great state of excitement, from the fact that the celebrated heiress, Miss Wynne, had just stopped there, and passed through on her way home.

Gerald had known her as a child, but that was years ago, and her very form and features had passed from his memory; nevertheless, he at first listened, as an idle traveller will, to the gossips around him. Those who had been so happy as to catch a glimpse of her face, vied with each other in praise of her many charms, while those who had not, listened with eagerness, and looked forward to indemnifying themselves by seeing her at church the next morning. Now, Gerald Mostyn had a strong prejudice against "fine ladies," and this one formed no exception to his antipathy. He despised the vulgar *éclat* that expended itself upon the merely adventitious circumstances of personal beauty, great wealth, and fine dress. And all this fuss made about Miss Wynne shared his contempt.

"Well," he said, within himself, "to-morrow, at morning service, I, too, shall have an opportunity of

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

seeing this "marvellous" fine lady, this heiress, beauty, muse, saint; and I shall find her a high-complexioned, expensively-arrayed young woman, full of boarding-school graces and fashionable piety! She will read her prayers from a gilt-edged book, and put a gold piece in the purse, so that all may see that she is "saint" as well as "muse, beauty, and heiress." Bah! fie upon tinsel glitter; fie upon false shows! If ever *I* marry, it will be some poor girl. Oh, for my ideal woman! oh, for my gifted daughter of toil—my nature's queen!" though our hero, as, half in loathing of the popular truckling to mere rank and wealth, half in aspiration towards the angel of his secret visions, he sauntered out of the house and strolled towards the forest.

The next morning being the Sabbath, Gerald Mostyn, who seldom absented himself from divine service, arose early, dressed, breakfasted, and set forth upon a walk of three miles down the hills, in other words, from Bleakton to Llyndell, where flourished Christ Church, in the parish of Crucis. But with sauntering, loitering, and looking from favourable points upon the familiar prospect, it was late when he reached the foot of the hills, where, in the lower skirt of the forest, stood the church. The church-yard was filled with carriages of every variety, from the coach and pair to the dog-cart, from the family carry-all to the single gig, and from the old dame's donkey to the squire's steed. But no human being except two young grooms, each left in charge of particularly wild horses, remained in the yard. All had passed into church, where the service had already commenced.

Gerald Mostyn, hat in hand, waited reverentially until the opening prayer was concluded, and then as reverently entered, passed up the aisle, and took his seat in a vacant side-pew, at the right hand of the pulpit, which commanded not only preacher, but the whole congregation. And while the minister was giving out the hymn, Gerald Mostyn naturally permitted his eyes to wander over the assembly. It was a country congregation. There in the lower end of the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

church, near the doors, and along the side walls, was the usual quantum of old-fashioned men and women, in coats and bonnets of a style in vogue half a century ago. There were aged gentlemen and gentlewomen, thrifty matrons, and rustic belles and beaux. And near the pulpit, were the wealthy families, and so-called "more important families," the aristocrats of the country. Here, occupying the large pew before the pulpit, were the Hortons. From his seat at the right hand of the pulpit, Gerald had a full view of this party. In the end nearest to him sat three blooming girls. These young women he identified as the Horton ladies. He scrutinized them to see if he could discover which was the heiress, Miss Wynne. All there were very pretty, according to the wax-doll standard of beauty, with slender forms, white skins, pink cheeks, blue eyes, and yellow curls. They were dressed in mauve-coloured bareges, with flounces, and small bonnets, with a profusion of flowers. With a family likeness among them, it was difficult to distinguish Miss Wynne from her cousins, the Misses Horton. But at length Gerald fixed upon the one at the upper end of the pew as Miss Wynne. He came to the opinion in this manner—first, because her form was taller and rounder, her skin whiter, her cheeks pinker, her eyes bluer, and her curls yellower than those of her companions; secondly, because she occupied the place of honour at the upper end of the pew! The longer he looked the surer he felt that this was the lady! She looked every inch the heiress, beauty, genius, saint—in her own estimation! She held her form erect, her head thrown back, and her eyes cast down—the very ideal of "the pride that apes humility." She held in her hand a prayer-book of green velvet and gilt. This is she! thought Gerald, as he weighed her in the balance, and found her marvellously "wanting." In the next pew sat Mrs. Horton, in the black silk gown, mantle, and bonnet that had been her Sunday-dress for the last forty years. By her side was her bachelor brother, Colonel North. And, near the door of the pew, sat a female plainly dressed, whom Gerald Mostyn had not

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

yet noticed, because she sat farthest from him, and held her head down, following the minister from the hymn-book that lay upon her lap. The minister finished the reading of the hymn, and the organist commenced playing the prelude. The congregation arose *en masse* to sing.

As Gerald Mostyn stood up, his eyes fell full upon the young girl at the lower end of Mrs. Horton's pew. And from that moment he saw no one else in the church! Was it merely love at first sight? Was it the spirit's recognition? What was it? The prophecy of his heart seemed fulfilled! In this plainly-dressed young woman, this humble companion of Mrs. Horton, he had found his ideal; he had recognized the concrete form of his abstract idea. There was something infinitely more beautiful, attractive, and potent than any external combination of colours could present. The noble mould of her features and expression of countenance was the outward sign of inward beauty—a majesty of love, wisdom, goodness and power, that attracted and absorbed the soul of the spectator. Her form was below the medium size, slender, well rounded, and perfectly symmetrical. Her complexion was pale and clear. Her hair, of the darkest shade of brown, seeming jet black, except when the sunshine brought out its bright hues, was parted above a forehead almost too broad and prominent, too majestic with the power of intellect for womanly beauty, but for the perfect sweetness and meekness of spirit about the expression of the face; the eyebrows were dark, well marked, and slightly arched; her eyes were clear, dark grey, large, full, and seemingly deeply set, but only overshadowed by the prominent brows, drooping lids, and long, close lashes; her nose was straight and well defined, her chin well rounded, and her lips beautifully curved and gently compressed. She was clothed with simplicity; a grey silk dress, and a plain straw bonnet with white strings, were the external items of her costume. Her dress revealed nothing except the good taste of the wearer: for the wealthiest heiress could find nothing prettier, nor the poorest governess anything cheaper for her

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Sunday's wear than this grey silk gown and straw bonnet. Gerald Mostyn made up his own mind: first, that he loved her; secondly, that she was Mrs. Horton's companion; thirdly, that he would seek her acquaintance, with the view of making her his wife.

While these feelings, thoughts, and purposes, engaged his mind, the morning service and sermon had passed off, without his knowing much of what was said or done. He had stood up with the singers, and knelt with the prayers, sat through the sermon with the listeners, and got up and bowed his head to receive the benediction with the others; but all this had been mechanical. When service was over, he went out and watched to see what would become of the girl who seemed to hold his fate in the hollow of her hand. When the Horton family reached the church-yard, they filed off in pairs to walk the distance between Christ Church and Llyndell Manor-house. The two sisters went arm-in-arm, the young *belle*, whom he took to be Miss Wynne, walked with Colonel North, and the unknown girl supported the steps of Mrs. Horton.

Gerald watched until the party had passed out of sight up the wood-path that led them towards their home. Then he turned to notice that everybody had left the church except himself and the clergyman, who seemed waiting to speak to him.

"You seem to be a stranger here, sir," said the latter, approaching him.

"A stranger in my native place, then, sir; but I have been absent many years, and times and acquaintances have changed. You, I believe, are one of the new comers?" said Gerald.

"I am William Osborne, sir, pastor of Christ Church Parish, at your service." Gerald bowed, replying—

"And I, reverend sir, am Gerald Mostyn, late of Radnor, at yours."

"I am happy to know you, Mr. Mostyn. And now, sir, if you have no more agreeable destination, I should be happy to have you return home and dine with me."

Now it had been Gerald's first intention to return to

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

his inn; but the temptation to attend afternoon service, in the hope of again seeing that noble girl, was strong within him. After a moment's reflection, he accepted the minister's invitation, and accompanied him to the parsonage—a pretty cottage, in a well-cultivated garden, a few rods off from the church. Here he was presented to Mr. Osborne's young wife, a pretty dark-haired woman, who made him welcome. In the course of the dinner, it had occurred to Gerald to speak of the unknown girl, and inquire her name and history; but ever a respectful regard for her kept him silent. At the hour for the afternoon service, he returned with Mr. and Mrs. Osborne to church. He went to the same pew he had occupied in the forenoon. The church was not so well filled as in the morning—there are so few people who assist at afternoon service. None of the Horton family were present, and a feeling of deep disappointment was beginning to manifest itself, as he vainly watched the door, and examined every new arrival. At last the desired of his eyes appeared. How his heart rebounded at sight of her. She came gravely up the aisle, and took her place in the seat she had occupied in the morning. Not only in the pew in which she sat, but in the whole front line of pews, she was the only person; yet in her devotion she seemed unconscious of, or indifferent to, this circumstance. Her manner was serious, earnest, fervent, yet without a shade of sanctimoniousness or asceticism. Gerald Mostyn was spell-bound in the contemplation of the soul's beauty irradiating her sweet and noble countenance. Now, whether there was anything in his covert and respectful, though fixed regards, to magnetize the subject, I do not know; but she lifted her eyelids, and met his gaze!—the sudden glances of those brilliant dark-grey eyes thrilled his soul with a strange, painful joy. He coloured like a detected trespasser, and fixed his eyes upon his book.

And when he stole a glance at her face, he noticed, with peculiar pleasure, that *her* eyes were cast down, and her pale cheek flushed. How his heart beat! What a magnetic girl was this, that the glance of her

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

eye, the dropping of her eyelashes, the flushing of her cheek, had power to thrill and agitate his frame, as by electricity! In the morning, it had seemed to him that should this royal-browed girl be that which she looked, he could wait and toil cheerfully long years, in the certain prospect of possessing her at last. But this afternoon, when her presence shook him like a storm, he felt that to *wait for her* he must fly her neighbourhood. And instead of attending to the services, he began to calculate—should she prove what he supposed her—how soon he might, properly, get presented to her, cultivate her acquaintance, woo her affections, propose for her hand, and make her his wife! Yes, how soon he might, without madness, gallop over these succeeding steps to the goal of his happiness. He concluded that, under favourable auspices, he could effect all this in one month! Then came up another subject of calculation—how long would it take him to graduate? when might he get admitted to the bar? how soon should he be able to get into a living practice? He decided that, with diligence, all might be accomplished in two years. But in the meantime, after paying his expenses, how far would the residue of his two thousand pounds go towards supporting a wife? That she was as poor, and poorer than himself, and less accustomed to luxuries of the table, and extravagances of the toilet, he felt convinced of, and rejoiced at. He concluded that the remnant of his two thousand pounds, college fees subtracted, would go very far towards supporting such an humble establishment as would content himself and his chosen wife, until he should get into practice, and begin to reap the golden harvest of fame and riches of which he dreamed. His course was now clear—to get, as soon as possible, an introduction to this girl. If he should find her what he expected, the rest would follow. He had refrained, in the forenoon, from inquiring her name; but after this evening there would be no opportunity, for a week, of ascertaining it. To wait seven more days for that knowledge was impossible. He resolved that after service he would make an opportunity of seeking the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

information from Mr. Osborne. So through the afternoon service, between his stolen glances at the unknown girl, he thought, planned, and dreamed, while the minister of God preached a sermon suited to his needs, had he listened to it, from the text—

"Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

When the services were over, and the congregation dispersed, Gerald Mostyn found that the desired of his eyes had disappeared. In vain he sought her everywhere; she had vanished! And while he was seeking her, the people were hurrying away to their homes, to escape the storm that was seen to be gathering in the west. And before he had thought to follow their example, his shoulder was touched by a friendly hand, and he saw Mr. Osborne by his side.

"You cannot get home before the storm bursts; it is beginning to rain; and hark to that thunder. You will have to come under my umbrella and walk home with me, to take refuge at the parsonage," said the minister.

Gerald Mostyn bowed and looked up at the sky. From north to south, all along the western horizon, extended a black cloud, with copper-coloured edges, like smoke and fire. Muttering thunder and large drops of rain, warned him that the storm was about to burst.

"I think, sir, I shall be obliged to accept your obliging offer," replied Gerald, smiling.

"Come on, then, sir! There is no time to lose in compliments," answered the minister, hoisting his large umbrella, and offering his arm to his invited guest. With a bow of thanks Gerald came under the shelter, and they took their way toward the parsonage. Now was an opportunity of learning the name and circumstance of the unknown girl. But the rain was falling fast, the wind was blowing, the path was rough, and conversation was difficult, so Gerald deferred the luxury of hearing of his beloved, until he could enjoy it under the shelter of Mr. Osborne's cottage roof.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

CHAPTER III.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BELOVED.

THEY got into the parsonage before the storm burst. Mr. Osborne opened the left side-door and showed his guest into the parlour. The room was empty.

"Where is your mistress, Peggy?" inquired the pastor of the servant-girl.

"Missus has gone up stairs with Miss Wynne," replied Peggy.

"Miss Wynne! She here!" exclaimed the minister, in surprise.

"Yes, master. She ran in here out of the rain, and went up stairs long ago to take off her bonnet."

"Mr. Mostyn, since there are ladies in the case, perhaps you would like to go to my room and arrange your toilet," said the minister, smiling.

"I am a little dishevelled, certainly," replied Gerald. And he arose to follow his kind host, who led him across the hall to an opposite chamber. Here he found a washstand, dressing-table, and their several appointments. Gerald washed his face, combed his hair, brushed his clothes, drew down his vest, pulled up his collar, and declared himself prepared to wait upon the ladies—"Though it will be a tremendous bore to have to sit all the evening and do the agreeable to that superfine *belle*, Miss Wynne," he thought.

The Minister, who had followed Gerald's example in attention to his toilet, and who was now ready, opened the door, and attended his guest back to the parlour. As they entered the room, Mrs. Osborne sprung up, and hastened to welcome her unexpected guest. But even while she was shaking hands with him, and he was expressing the pleasure he felt in being thus forced to take up his quarters at the parsonage for the evening, he caught a glimpse of another figure seated by the window, the sight of whom made his heart bound, and his brain reel. And while the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

scene was swimming before him, and while he still believed that image to be an optical delusion, Mrs. Osborne led him up to the figure, and said, with a prettily simulated formality—

"Miss Wynne, permit me to present to you Mr. Mostyn. Mr. Mostyn, Miss Wynne;" and before Gerald had time to recover from his astonishment, the unknown girl arose and placed her hand in his, and said, with the sweetest smile, and in the sweetest tones—

"I am very happy to meet you, sir. I have not forgotten my old, old playmate, although Mr. Mostyn has forgotten Constance Wynne!"

Gerald Mostyn bowed over the hand she had given him, and as he respectfully resigned it, and placed himself at her side, he replied—

"Miss Wynne possesses a better memory for acquaintances than the prosperous usually possess for those less favoured by fortune."

"Fortune! She is a heathen goddess. I do not fall down and worship her," answered Constance with a sweet dignity. Gerald bowed. He could as yet scarcely trust himself to speak again. A host of bewildering impressions crowded upon him. Here before him was the ideal of his soul—the desired of his heart—the delight of his eyes! alas, no equal of his own in adverse fortune! No daughter of the people was she, whom he could ask to toil, struggling beside him, up life's rugged ascent; but the great, moneyed celebrity of the county—the great, landed heiress, to whose lofty alliance only men of the highest rank, fortune, and distinction, might dare to aspire. And for him, a poor student, to pretend to the hand of Miss Wynne, would seem presumptuous, mercenary, mad! Memory was travelling backward through the past to pause on the one bright morn when, at a May-day festival, he had danced with Constance. She was then a child of six years of age, he a boy of twelve. Yet she had remembered him, while he had forgotten her—but that was natural, for doubtless he had changed less in features than she had. Not long lingered his mind on

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

the past; it came back to the painful present, to dwell amid the fragments of his shattered dream. Alas! she was not for him, he thought; as well might he love bright Luna, the calm queen of night, and hope to bring her down to beam for him alone, as to think of Miss Wynne, with the remotest wish to wed her. Hence all that remained for him to do was to battle with and conquer the infatuation that had taken possession of him. This storm of thought, feeling, and resolution, hurried through his mind in a few moments that he stood listening and replying to the heiress. And before it became necessary for him to force himself to speak again, they were joined by Mr. and Mrs. Osborne and Francis Heath, the brother of the latter, a dark-haired and dark-eyed young man, with a highly intellectual and melancholy expression of countenance, and thoughtful manners and conversation;—everyone said—one even more adapted than his brother-in-law to the discharge of a clergyman's duties. Mr. Osborne brought him up to the group; and after both gentlemen had paid their respects to Miss Wynne, the former presented the latter to his guest—in the following style:

"Mr. Mostyn, allow me to introduce to your favourable notice my brother-in-law, a student of medicine, under Dr. James Horne. Gerald bowed, and sat down again, in bitterness of spirit. He had recognized in Mr. Heath the young gentleman, who, at the village inn, had spoken with so much enthusiasm of Miss Wynne. He saw him take a seat on her other side, and with the air of an old friend, enter into conversation with her. And the pangs of jealousy were added to those of desponding love. To make matters worse, Mr. Osborne drew him into discourse, so that he could no longer have the tantalizing pleasure of listening to her voice in *tête-à-tête* with his supposed rival. Did his countenance betray his feelings, and did she perceive it?

He was almost tempted to believe so, for through his covert glances he noticed that her eyes were turned towards him; and in meeting her eyes, she flushed; and soon after, with a bow and a smile, she terminated her *tête-a-tête*, and addressed a remark to

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Mr. Osborne, which opened a discussion, through which the conversation became general. It was now that the light of her glorious soul beamed forth. The subject under debate was the indisputable prevalence of social evil, and the inefficiency of legal statutes to prevent crime. The prison systems, with their doubtful tendencies, were considered. Capital punishment, and the recently-started question of its abolishment, was discussed. Mr. and Mrs. Osborne took the cautious, conservative view. Miss Wynne assumed a more enlightened, liberal, and humane position. Mr. Osborne said low, uneducated, unregenerate men were like animals, whose selfishness, brutality and violence, would only be governed by *fear;* that fear of imprisonment was the best safeguard to property; fear of the gallows, the best protective of life; fear of consequences the best preventive of crime. Gerald Mostyn listened to the minister's words, but looked the while on Miss Wynne's face—that grew upon his vision as the face of a young archangel; under her majestic brow, her large eyes, fixed on the speaker, glowed like two luminous stars; a flush reddened her cheeks; her lips, as if touched with heavenly fire, glowed with the utterance that would not be repressed. And as soon as the minister ceased, she replied. Constance said that punishment was retaliation; retaliation was vengeance; and vengeance, the offspring of hate and fear, whence no good could ever come. That fear was the basest of all bad passions—the basest to feel in ourselves, the basest to appeal to in others; that it was our own fears for the safety of life and property that instigated us to act upon the fears of others to ensure the preservation of those treasures; that as fear was the worst motive, so force was the worst means; that the treatment of evil-doers should not be vindictive, but reformatory—should not seek to crush but to save; that the one great redeeming power on earth, as in heaven, was—Faith as opposed to Fear; Good as opposed to Evil—in one word, Love as opposed to Hate—eternal omniscient, omnipotent Love.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Constance spoke earnestly, enthusiastically, light streaming from her eyes, and colour burning on her cheeks, as the words glowed on her lips. Gerald watched her, wondering no longer that people called her most beautiful, for her characteristic countenance was the medium of a high, spiritual beauty, of which the most classic regularity of feature could not have been susceptible. For how could the pretty receding forehead of the 'world-renowned statue,' the Medicean Venus, compare with *her* royal breadth of brow? Or how could the bloom of any wax-doll complexion vie with the delicate pallor of *her* cheek with its flashes of electric fire? These were the lover's questions, and not mine—the lover's questions, his eyes, heart, and soul, hung entranced on her countenance. Perhaps the unconscious fixedness of his regard magnetized her attention, for she met the eyes of Gerald, and with sudden self-consciousness, blushed at having been so far drawn out in debate, and became silent.

"You must all receive Miss Wynne's views, especially on the subject of capital punishment, with a degree of allowance. Miss Wynne has a vital interest in having the death penalty abolished," the minister said, turning to that young lady.

But to the astonishment of Gerald, Constance turned pale, compressed her lips, and clenched her hands, as if compelling down some rising and almost overwhelming emotion. Gerald, guessing that the minister had made an unlucky speech, hastened to do away its effects by laughingly saying—

"*I* take an especial personal interest in having capital punishment abolished—Miss Wynne, do you believe in astrology?"

Constance started, fixed her eyes intently upon the questioner, and then withdrawing them, answered—

"I do not know. 'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in our philosophy.' If we are to place confidence in history, there are many recorded testimonies to the truth of astrology. And I do not reject a science or a theory because I do not understand it."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"When you hear Miss Wynne talk in that style, I would remind you that the great Doctor Johnson believed in ghosts!" said Mr. Osborne.

Without heeding this remark, Miss Wynne turned to Gerald, and said—

"Why did you ask me if I believe in astrology?"

"Because, Miss Wynne, I was about to relate for your amusement a prediction that was made concerning myself by a professor of that black art."

"A prediction!" exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, with interest.

"Yes, madam," replied Gerald, "a prediction which, if I believed, would certainly not dispose me to favour the abolishment of the death penalty."

Constance was listening, her chin resting upon her hand, her eyes fixed upon his face, in earnest attention.

"Miss Wynne, you do not probably recollect the Egyptian Dervish, Achbad, who some years ago, attended by an interpreter, travelled through the country, casting horoscopes, exposing the past, revealing the present, and predicting the future?"

"Oh, yes! I do!" exclaimed Constance. "But go on with your story, Mr. Mostyn," she continued, without relaxing her almost painful attention.

CHAPTER IV.

MYSTERIOUS PREDICTIONS.

"MY story," replied Gerald Mostyn, "is short, but singular. Three years since, while I was sojourning in Brighton, before going to the university, I chanced to hear of the Egyptian Dervish, Achbad, who was creating quite a sensation there. His wonderful reputation was the theme of every tongue.

"Idleness and curiosity combined to lead me to his rooms, which were situated in the fourth story of an obscure lodging-house in a back street, and where I found a leather-coloured old gentleman, in a voluminous white turban, and an ample flowing black robe,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

bound around his waist with a white scarf, and bordered around the sweeping skirts, with the signs of the zodiac in white. This was the Egyptian astrologer."

"Some clever Yankee actor," suggested Mr. Osborne.

"No, sir! he had the unmistakable Egyptian features. Impostor he might have been! Yankee or European he was not!"

"Well, sir! well! the astrologer?" inquired Constance.

"Well, Miss Wynne, this old man, this *soi-disant* astrologer, I found with appropriate surroundings—skulls, cross-bones, and skeletons; serpents, toads, and lizards; stills, crucibles, and cauldrons occupied the floor. Maps of unknown countries, probably Hades, and charts of unknown figures—probably diabolical—adorned the walls. At the upper end of the room was a large circle of wood painted black and set up perpendicularly against the wall, like a huge, round blackboard, and covered with mystic figures drawn in white. Opposite this, at the other extremity of the room, was a large mystic mirror. The only personal attendant of the old astrologer was the French interpreter. I made known my business, whereupon he put me through many preliminary degrees, too tedious to mention, and then began to unroll my whole life. He told me first of the past, of the loss of my mother, my father, and then of my home. I thought that he was deceiving me, that he saw 'alone' written legibly upon my brow, and only read it aloud. So I told him that I had not come thither to inquire of the past, which was well known to me, but to hear of the future, of which I was ignorant. Whereupon he required a night to cast my horoscope. He demanded, and I gave him, the day and hour of my birth, and then I took leave, with the promise to return in the morning. The next day I went——"

"Well?" questioned Constance, earnestly.

"My horoscope was a *horror*scope indeed! It predicted for me *a short and stormy life, and a sharp and sudden death!*"

"Good heaven! But—the details!"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"It prophesied four remarkable events, the first of which has already come to pass."

"And that was?"

"The loss of my patrimonial estate!"

"Singular coincidence!" interrupted Mr. Osborne, as he arose and joined his wife and brother-in-law at the other end of the room.

"I thought so when the prophecy was fulfilled," replied Gerald.

"And the other three events?" softly inquired Constance.

"The other three events, if they follow as predicted, must happen within the next two years, or before I reach my twenty-sixth anniversary. The first of these is to be the unexpected inheritance of vast wealth."

Upon hearing this a bright smile played around the lips of Constance. She waited a few minutes for him to proceed, but finding that he continued silent, she said—

"Well, Mr. Mostyn, go on! what was the third predicted event?"

"Do not command me to inform you?"

"No, sir; I beg you, of courtesy, to do so."

"Very well," he said, dropping his voice to a low undertone. "It was my marriage with the woman I should love."

A deep blush supplanted the bright smile that quivered over Constance's face. There was a pause, broken at length by her voice, as she gently inquired—"And the fourth?"

The answer came in tones so low as to meet only her ear—

"The fourth and last prediction was, that *before my twenty-sixth birthday I should die a violent death.*"

A low cry broke from the lips of Constance, as her hands flew up, and covered her face. After a minute or two she dropped them, and looking him steadily in the face, said with firmness—

"You doubtless wonder at my emotion. Now, hear me. On the autumn following the summer in which that prediction was made to you, I was in York, with

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

my grandmother, and with Mrs. Osborne, who was then Miss Heath. Curiosity took us to the rooms of the Egyptian, who was then practising in that city. And after some preparations as he had used in your case, he cast my horoscope, and read my future. It was this—that before my twentieth birthday, I should be a bride, but never a wife, for that the fatal form of the scaffold arose between the nuptial benediction and the husband's hearth. Such were the words of the prophecy! —a similar prediction was made by an old gipsy at the Derby only this spring."

She spoke with a solemnity that seemed to overshadow every other feeling. There was a pause, interrupted at length by Gerald Mostyn, who, in a tone so grave that it partook of rebuke, inquired—

"But assuredly a woman of Miss Wynne's intellectual power, and, above all, of her Christian faith, can never for an instant give serious credence to such absurd pagan mummeries."

Immediately after making this presumptuous speech, Gerald felt conscious that he might have given offence, and he turned with anxiety to note its effect upon Miss Wynne.

But Constance had no morbid self-love to be so easily affronted. Her brilliant eyes were fixed upon him with an expression of confidence, respect, and gratitude, as she bowed her head and replied—

"You think this a weakness, and I thank you for letting me know that you do—"

"Miss Wynne, I do beseech you, pardon me!"

"Pardon? I said I *thanked* you, and I really do; pray *always* speak to me with the same frankness. To return to the first subject. I know not really what quantity or quality of belief I accord to this prophecy. Phrenologists give me large ideality, sublimity, marvellousness, and veneration—these go to form a very grand reverence for the spiritnal and supernatural—'

"But your reason, Miss Wynne, should arm you against such superstition—pardon me! Again I am presuming."

"No, you are not. And my reason does not arm me

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

with incredulity; reason only assures me that I should not reject a science because I cannot comprehend it. And my reading teaches me that the Druses claim to be the last depositaries of the lost art of foretelling the future, and that the frequent fulfilment of their predictions are on record. As regards myself, Mr. Mostyn, I confess to you, that despite of faith and reason, this dark prophecy sometimes overshadows my spirit."

"I wonder at that."

"Aye—in my most devotional hours, and in my gayest moments, the memory of this prediction, like the black wing of a fiend, suddenly swoops down upon me, changing all my brightness and gravity into gloom and horror!"

"The vagrants! They should not be suffered to wander up and down the country, scattering their seeds of misery, and—

"'Taking captive the ears of foolish women, you would say.'"

"Nay—I would say nothing so arrogant."

"Well," said Miss Wynne, "this must I say in self-defence—that, had the prediction of which I speak involved *only* my own life—had it been foretold that Constance Wynne must die thus prematurely and ignominiously, I could look bravely in the face of fate, nor shudder to meet it when it comes! That is natural! The most selfish among us can suffer with more fortitude than we could sin, and die with more courage than we could kill another. But that this early and shameful death should have been foretold of me as a consequence of—" She paused, shuddering, and then exclaimed—"But this is very culpable weakness! Surely it must be the gathering in of this gloomy evening that so oppresses my spirits—it can be nothing else. God reigns! and I appeal from the astrologer's prediction to His omnipotent protection!"

Then shaking off the shadow from her brow, and speaking with bright cheerfulness, she called out—

"Mr. Osborne, how goes the night? Will there be a probability of my returning home this evening?"

The minister, who, with his wife and brother-in-law,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

formed a little self-constituted committee upon Sunday-schools, now spoke up in reply—

"Miss Wynne, hearken to the rain! No living creature shall leave my roof to-night for any bourne whatever, except it be stout Peter, whom I shall send to the Manor-house, to apprise your friends of your whereabouts."

"Very well, Mr. Osborne. You are aware that I never carry on a contest at the end of which I am sure of defeat! I yield myself your captive!" said Constance gaily.

Gerald Mostyn walked to the window, thence to the door, and finally up to Mr. Osborne, whom he addressed—

"I fear, sir, notwithstanding the state of the weather, that I shall be under the necessity of bidding you good evening."

"Mr. Mostyn! I presume you heard the observation I addressed to Miss Wynne, and which is equally applicable to yourself, and to my brother Frank here. Likewise I suppose you are sufficiently well acquainted with these mountains to know that it will be impossible for you to ascend to-night, or even to-morrow. I suppose that no urgent business calls you to Bleaktown. Moreover, listen to that rain!" said the minister.

The rain was increasing, and beating with violence against the house. There was no gainsaying it. Still Gerald hesitated until his host whispered to him, with an arch look—

"Do as you like, else I'll make you!"

With a sigh that was not one of regret, Mr. Mostyn yielded the point, thanked his friend, and consented to remain, as he secretly wished to do, the guest of the house that sheltered Constance Wynne. Lights were then brought in, and Mrs. Osborne went out to give orders for tea, which was soon served. After tea, when the company were re-assembled in the parlour, Mr. Osborne said—

"Come, Miss Wynne, we cannot let the opportunity of your presence this evening pass unimproved. I know you will favour us with one of Haydn's or Beethoven's

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

grand anthems!" and rising, he took the hand of Constance, and led her to the organ, that graced the minister's parlour.

Without stooping to any of the insincere apologies in vogue with young ladies upon such occasions, Miss Wynne seated herself before the organ, and, amidst a profound silence, commenced a solemn prelude, and then with her voice struck into the sublime strains of—

"I know that my Redeemer liveth."

Not a whisper was uttered, scarcely a breath was drawn, as that awful melody arose and swelled upon the air. The voice of the musician was a rich double contralto of surpassing depth and power. She sang with a perfect self-surrender, pouring her whole soul in song. Her head was raised, her dark hair swept back from her wide forehead, her clear eyes lifted; and as the anthem ascended, how gloriously with heavenly inspiration shone that broad, white forehead, how splendid with dazzling light those clear, grey eyes! For the whole length of the piece she held her audience bound in a celestial trance. At its long-drawn close, while yet her fingers lingered on the keys, and her eyes soared aloft, the death silence that continued was the truest and most fitting tribute to the effect of her performance. She was the first to recover from the spell that she had created and shared. Quickly rising, she left the instrument, and crossed the room to her own seat upon the sofa.

"That was magnificent!" exclaimed Mr. Heath. "I doubt if the great work of the great master was ever better rendered."

"Yes, her performance of sacred music is admirable. And her skill is altogether the triumph of mind over matter; her voice is a made one, the effect of cultivation, not the gift of nature."

"What, those magnificent tones that filled all the air, that filled our hearts like a charge of electricity, those rich, deep, thrilling, thunderous tones——"

"Were Constance's own creation. Her natural voice was a soprano. But her soul was full of music as a

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

storm-cloud of electricity, and with years of toil and study she prepared its fitting utterances. You see the result."

While these two gentlemen talked apart, Gerald Mostyn approached, and seated himself near Constance Wynne. He had no word of commonplace compliment to pay her; her music was above all praise—to have offered such a tribute would have been impertinent. But he might at least return thanks.

"In common with your friends, I am much indebted to you for a profound enjoyment, Miss Wynne," he said.

"I am very happy in having pleased you, sir. You prefer sacred music, I imagine?"

"I do, much above every other sort."

"And so do I. I think the highest powers in music can only be drawn out in the praise of God; it is as though they had been religiously reserved for that service."

Gerald bowed profoundly.

"It must be so," he said, "though this thought had not occurred to me."

Thus again they were launched into a *téte-à-téte*, which lasted until the social circle broke up for the night. Then, with a "good night" that fell like a benediction, Constance withdrew, under the charge of Mrs. Osborne.

"Francis, you know where to find your bed," said the clergyman, putting a night-lamp into the hands of his brother-in-law, who with a grave bow, left the parlour.

"And now, Sir Knight of the Awful Brow, I am at *your* command," smiled Mr. Osborne, taking up the remaining taper to attend his last guest.

With a nod of assent Gerald Mostyn followed his host across the hall, to the chamber to which he had been first introduced.

"Here is your dormitory. There is your bell. If anything is wanted, ring an alarm. Sleep soundly. Dream pleasantly, so you do not dream of Constance Wynne, for that would be 'Love's Labour Lost' with a vengeance!

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

'MAN may not hope *her* heart to win,
Be *his* of common mould.'

Good night."

And so saying, the host withdrew, and left his guest alone.

"Not dream of Constance Wynne." Would he ever dream of anything else by night? Would he ever think of anything else by day? He had scarcely known her twelve hours, yet in that time, from every look, and tone, and gesture of hers, he had quaffed deep draughts of love, that seemed to have changed his whole destiny.

"Not dream of Constance Wynne," indeed! Why, henceforth she possessed him like an inspiring spirit, beat within his pulses, burned within his heart, thought within his brain—lived within his soul. He might never look upon her outward face again, after the next morning; but henceforth and for ever, he felt that his soul was wedded to hers.

For some time sleep was impossible; for though he closed his eyes, he still saw Constance Wynne, with her white forehead, her dark hair swept back from the wide temples, and her clear, luminous, most expressive eyes, now soaring to the heavens in an upward flight, now dropped on his face in an earnest, penetrating study, now looking for some wondrous truth or beauty in the distant horizon of human knowledge. Long after all the rest of the household were asleep, Gerald Mostyn lay awake, haunted by the image of Constance Wynne. It was consequently late in the morning when he awoke. Aware of the early hours kept at country houses, he arose, and rung his bell. It was answered by the servant boy, Fred, who brought him his well-cleaned boots, and supplied him with fresh water. He made a hasty but careful toilet. And then he went into the parlour, where he found Mr. and Mrs. Osborne, and Mr. Heath, awaiting him. He greeted the circle, and looked anxiously around for another desired presence. But Constance Wynne was nowhere visible. At a signal from the pastor, all sat down for the reading of the Scriptures, before the morning prayers. But

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Gerald Mostyn did not derive much benefit from the exercise,

> For ever close and near
> A lady's voice was in his ear,
> So that the priest he could not hear.

The chapter finished, they all knelt down. Why did she not come? Perhaps she was late with her toilet, yet that was so simple, too. It was discourteous not to wait for her. Such were his thoughts while, wandering from his devotion, he watched the door. But she came not; and when they had all arisen from their knees, Mrs. Osborne smilingly announced that breakfast was served, and led the way to the dining-room.

"Surely they will not sit down without their fair guest?" he said.

But they gathered around the table. When they had said grace, and were seating themselves, he summoned resolution to say—

"I hope Miss Wynne is well this morning?"

"Very well, as always. She has flitted!"

"Flitted?"

"Gone, departed, vanished!"

CHAPTER V.

AN AGREEABLE CHANGE OF RESIDENCE.

MRS. HORTON, the mistress of Llyndell, had been twice married, and twice widowed. Constance Wynne was the descendant of her first marriage. The three beauties—the Misses Horton—were the children of her second union. The sole male inmate, and protector of the family, was Colonel North, the younger brother of Mrs. Horton. For Constance, as the heiress of the family estate, she felt the utmost solicitude, and was never willing to trust her far or long from her sight. And consequently, on receiving Mr. Osborne's message that Miss Wynne was detained at

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

his house by the storm, she had summoned her coachman, and given him orders to have the carriage in readiness by sunrise next morning, to drive over to the parsonage and bring his young mistress home. The man had scrupulously followed her directions.

Constance had obeyed the call, and reached Llyndell in time for the family breakfast. After kissing the fingers of the old lady, shaking hands with Colonel North, embracing her cousins, and answering everybody's questions, Constance seated herself at the table, and said—

"My dear grandmother, there is the son of an old friend of yours in the neighbourhood."

"Ah, Constance, who is he?"

"Mr. Gerald Ross Mostyn, madam. He has come down to spend the two months' vacation at Crucis."

"Aye, my dear. Where is he staying?"

"At the tavern at Bleakton."

"Indeed! I wonder at that; it is scarcely a pleasant place for a gentleman's long sojourn. Why is he not the guest of his grandfather, Mr. Horne, or of his uncle, the doctor?"

"It would be scarcely pleasant, madam, for a man to be indebted even for hospitality to relatives who have robbed him of his patrimony."

"Robbed him? Surely, my dear, you use strong language!" said the old lady, rebukingly.

"Truly! It was a judicial robbery—not an indictable one," said Constance, in calm scorn.

"Aye I have heard that, morally speaking, there was not just dealing; and law and justice are not always one, my dear."

"But to return to Mr. Mostyn himself. As you observed, madam, the inn is no pleasant abode for a gentleman——"

"Aye, I understand you, Constance. And I think you are altogether right, my dear," replied the aged gentlewoman, who, then turning to her brother, said, with the formality she sometimes used even among her own near relatives—

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Colonel North, you are thinking of going to Bleakton to-day. Will you do me the favour to call on Mr. Mostyn, and invite him to make our house his home for the period of his sojourn in the neighbourhood?"

"Certainly, my dear sister, with great pleasure," replied the colonel, looking up from his plate, and bowing his head.

"And mind my dear brother, let your invitation be most cordial and pressing; as though his coming to us would be a personal favour to ourselves; for these young men of good birth and ill fortune, are full of fastidious scruples which do them honour, but which must not be allowed to do them injury. You see, my dears," continued the old lady, turning toward her grand-daughters, "the poor young gentleman might feel obliged to decline the first or second invitation, if it were not cordially given, upon the ground of his not being able in any way to reciprocate. So you will be very pressing, Colonel North."

"I will bring him to the house, madam," replied the colonel.

Constance gave him a grateful look. Did she reciprocate Gerald Mostyn's sudden predilection? We shall see. Immediately after breakfast, Colonel North, attended by a servant with a led horse, set out to ride to Bleakton.

* * * * * *

The same forenoon, Gerald Mostyn, in his room at the inn of Bleakton, sat studying at his reading-table. The volume open before him was "Coke upon Lyttleton." But vainly he tried to confine his attention to the subject under treatment.

Constance! Constance! She filled his heart, and engaged his thoughts. Had she been the poor maiden he had first supposed her, then all had been easy enough. He would soon have put their mutual relations on an intelligible footing, and then gone on, undistracted by sorrow, hopefully, perseveringly, plodding at his studies, until diligence should be rewarded by success, and he should be in a position to claim her hand. But alas!

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

she was an heiress and a minor under the charge of jealous guardians, and one to whose hand only the most distinguished man might aspire! *He* would probably never see her again, except he should go to church to seek in silent distance that painful pleasure. He should, surely, never have the opportuuity of *conversing* with her again.

"Heart! *despair* of her and be at rest," said his reason.

But his heart could not rest, and would not despair.

"Fool! have you lost all self-control and power of attention?" inquired *reason.*

"No! I can restrain my feelings," answered *will.*

And for the twentieth time he resumed his studies. In vain! and closing the volume, he walked to and fro across his room. At length there came a rap at the door, and to his "Come in," entered a servant, who said that there was a gentleman in the bar inquiring for Mr. Mostyn.

"Show him up," said the latter, who thought only of Mr. Osborne or of Mr. Heath. The servant departed, and in a few minutes returned and ushered in a tall, gray-haired, military-looking old gentleman, who entered, bowing and holding out his hand to the student, who advanced to receive him.

"Mr. Mostyn, I presume?" inquired the visitor.

"Yes, sir," replied Gerald.

"Colonel North," said the visitor, announcing himself with a bow.

"I am very happy to see you, Colonel North. Pray be seated," said Mr. Mostyn, handing a chair. The old gentleman sat down.

"Hearing that you had re-visited your native neighbourhood, I do myself the pleasure of making you a call."

The young man bowed as he resumed his seat, and said—

"You do *me* great honour, Colonel North." With a wave of the hand the colonel repudiated this sentiment, and said—

"Your father and myself were once dear friends; our

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

friendship was only interrupted by his death! but you scarcely recollect this?"

"I certainly remember seeing you at our house, sir, as well as my father's frequent visits to yours."

"Very well, then; now we shall understand each other! My niece, Miss Wynne, tells me you are down here for a stay of two months. Now your father's son should make no other house his home save that which shelters me. I bear the compliments of Mrs. Horton, together with her solicitations joined to my own, that you will do us the honour to take up your abode with us for the term of your stay in the neighbourhood."

"Really, sir, Mrs. Horton—and *yourself*—are excessively kind, and I earnestly thank you."

"You will come, then?"

"Sir, permit me to express my deep sense of your goodness, even while I beg leave to decline your invitation."

"Aye, but 'leave to decline' will not be granted you, my friend. The thing is impossible. My word is passed to the ladies to bring you back with me," rejoined the colonel.

His "word passed to the *ladies*"—perhaps to Constance. Had *she* ought to do with this invitation? Why not? It was *she* who had told her uncle of his intended sojourn in the neighbourhood. And oh! if Constance willed that he should go, her will was law! In this case the very *suspicion* of her will was—*destiny!* He would conquer his repugnance to receiving hospitality from the wealthy; he would go, if only for a few days.

"Well," he said, holding out his hand to the colonel, "ladies' commands have as much authority as a bench warrant. I will give you no trouble in executing them. I am heartily at your and the ladies' disposal. And in all candour I am compelled to say that never was a poor gentleman arrested with more pleasure."

"That is honest. Well, you will find us no harsh wardens. How soon will you be ready to set out? I came on purpose to fetch you, and my servant brought a horse for your accommodation."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"I can be ready in an hour, sir," replied Mr. Mostyn, after a moment's thought, and resuming the natural gravity of his manner.

"Good. I have some business to do here that will occupy me for that length of time, at the end of which I will call for you!" said the colonel, rising and taking a short leave. And in one hour more the colonel, with his invited guest, set out for Llyndell.

CHAPTER VI.

NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS.

"EVANS, come hither," said Mrs. Horton, addressing the matronly woman, who within the last few years, had been her mistress' confidential agent in all domestic affairs. Evans left the china closet where she had been putting away the breakfast service, and came to the side of her lady, who was seated in her high-backed chair, near the door of the adjoining bed-chamber, and engaged in crochet.

"Evans, attend to me. I expect company to-day—Mr. Ross Mostyn, a gentleman of family, and *once* also of fortune. You will prepare the *back* room, *left* hand, *second* floor, for his accommodation. Put up the fringed white dimity curtains to the windows and the white and scarlet-tulip quilt on the bed. Then go to the store-house and select a second-best ham, and second-best round of spiced beef; from the pantry take a pair of medium pullets; get up the home-made wine from the cellars; from the garden and orchards the second-best vegetables and fruits for dinner; and when you come to lay the cloth, put on the plain gilt-edged china service. You understand?"

"Oh, yes, madam. I'm to prepare for second-best *company*, generally."

"Ahem-m! I did not say that, but I think you understand me, Evans. Therefore, finish arranging that closet as quickly as you can, and attend to my orders," said the old lady, who, notwithstanding her

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"graduated scale," could not bear to be thought a respecter of persons. Evans finished her work and went out to obey. But she had scarcely closed the door behind her, when a violent barking of the dogs announced that a visitor or visitors had arrived.

"Is it the colonel with our guests?" said the old lady to herself.

But in a few moments Evans re-entered with a face full of interest, and even of excitement.

"Well, Evans, who is it?"

"Oh, madam, a rale nob."

"Evans, how many times have I ordered you not to use such terms in my presence? Pray, what do you mean by a nob?"

"I beg your pardon, madam—it is a rale responsible, respectable, portly-looking gentleman."

"Who is he, then?"

"Indeed, I don't know; but he come in a carriage, with a young gentleman and a servant. Oh! here comes David now with a card," said the woman, as the waiter entered, and put the pasteboard into the hands of his mistress. The old lady arranged her spectacles, and read—

"'Lord Starr!' Lord Starr! The new minister! Dear me! David!"

"Madam!"

"Where did you show the gentlemen?"

"Into the front drawing-room, madam."

"Right; now return to them and say that your mistress will wait upon them in a few minutes. Then go and have the carriage put up, and the horses fed and stabled."

"Yes, madam," said the servant, bowing and retiring.

"Evans, come with me into my chamber, and help me to arrange my toilet," was the next command given, as the old lady arose and passed into her bed-chamber, which joined this, the family breakfast-room. And while Evans assisted her to exchange her black silk dress for one of black velvet, and her plain book-muslin cap and neckerchief for finer ones of lace, Mrs. Horton said—

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"And oh, Evans, Lord Starr will stay to dinner, and remain over night. Prepare the front room, right hand, first floor, for his accommodation. Put up the best embroidered curtains to the windows, the best Marseilles toilet-cover on the table, and the best Marseilles counter-pane on the bed; take away the delf toilet-service, and replace it with French china. And for dinner order the best—hams, chickens, vegetables, and fruits. In addition to the dessert have ice-cream. Don't put a bottle of home-made wine on the table; but have a hamper of that old port brought from the cellar, and the best hock. For the dinner service, use the Sevres china. Now, do you comprehend me, so that you need not commit the barbarism of sending for me from the drawing-room?"

"Certainly, madam; I am now to prepare for the very *best* company," replied the woman, in sly glee.

"Evans, how often have I signified to you that I am no respecter of persons?" inquired her mistress, in some displeasure.

"I never presumed for to say you were, madam."

"No! for that would be unchristian; nevertheless, Evans, even the Scriptures exhort us to pay 'honour to whom honour is due'."

"Yes, madam."

"There! now I think I will do—stay! take this pearl snuff-box and give me my gold one; now my pearl-handled-fan; that will do. Call David to go before me and open the doors."

But as Evans went out to obey this order, Constance Wynne entered. Constance looked, as ever, stately, graceful, and distinguished, with her dark tresses swept back in shining masses from her fair, broad brow, and her perfect form attired in a white muslin dress with a close-fitting bodice, flowing sleeves, and a skirt that fell in voluminous folds from her rounded waist to her feet. Not a single item of ornament drew off attention from her noble person.

"Oh, Constance, my dear, I am glad you looked in. I was wishing to speak to you. Do you know who is below?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Yes, madam, Lord Starr and his son, Captain Starr."

"Aye! and now I have a word to say to you, my dear! Lord Starr is a nobleman of immense fortune, occupying a high social position, even independent of his present exalted official rank."

"Yes, madam."

"He is a widower, but fifty-two years of age, very handsome, very accomplished, and very fascinating in his address."

"Well, my dear grandmother, what then?"

"Child, don't you see? Why your dress is too *plain*, Constance. Go, I beg of you, and exchange it for your embroidered India muslin and your set of pearls; for reflect, I beseech you, Constance, that there is not only Lord Starr, a widower of fifty-two, but his son, a young gentleman of twenty-five—both eligible—*most* eligible matches."

"Grandmother!" said Constance, in a tone almost of reproach.

"Will you do this, Constance?"

"Dear madam, pardon me, I cannot: but my cousins are beautifully dressed, they will save the credit of the family."

"Umph! well! I am thankful that the Misses Horton understand what is fitting," said the old lady. Then recovering her temper, and unwilling to offend her most esteemed grand-daughter, she hastened to say—

"Do not mistake me: I wish you to have every aid of dress that your ample fortune can justify, though you look very well as you are, my dear: a noble lady, whatever you wear. Ah! here comes David to attend me. Well! my child! come in when you feel disposed." And so saying, the old lady smoothed the folds of her dress, and crossed the hall to enter the drawing-room. Constance Wynne, for the present, delayed presenting herself. But the three Misses Horton, like gaily-plumaged birds of paradise, flew down the stairs and fluttered into the drawing-room.

"Will he come? will he come?" mused Constance, as she passed through Mrs. Horton's chamber into the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

breakfast-room, and thence on into the front sitting-room, and taking up a book, placed herself at the window-seat, to read, and to watch the bridle-path leading down the mountain side from Bleakton.

Soon three horsemen rambled over the brow of the ridge and came into sight. She *guessed* before she *recognized* their identity, and arose to smooth her dark tresses and straighten the folds of her dress. For Constance Wynne was too thoroughly a woman to be indifferent to her personal appearance. Meanwhile the three horsemen reached the lawn. Colonel North leaped from his horse, threw his bridle to his servant, and welcomed Mr. Mostyn, who had alighted, to Llyndell. Both gentlemen then entered the house.

David, who was on duty as porter, bowed and informed his master that a room had been prepared for the expected visitor.

"Very well, show Mr. Mostyn thither, and attend his orders. Meanwhile, sir," said the colonel, turning and addressing his guest, "I will go to my room to brush up a little, and a quarter of an hour hence will await you."

"*Au revoir*, then," replied Mr. Mostyn, following his attendant up the stairs and down the passage until they reached "the back room, left hand," that had been prepared for him. And after a few attentions to his toilet. Gerald Mostyn announced himself ready, and went below, where, in the hall, he found Colonel North awaiting him.

"I hear that we have visitors since I left this morning. Lord Starr, the new minister, and his son, Captain Starr, of the Horse Guards. Come, shall we go in?" said the colonel. Mr. Mostyn nodded assent, and both passed into the drawing-room. As Gerald crossed the threshold, the change from the broad sunshine into the subdued light of the sumptuous drawing-room showed him a number of persons present, but not their identities. Colonel North, after a circular bow directed to the whole company, led his guest up to the end of the room, where, in a high-backed chair, sat a stately

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

old lady, in a black velvet dress, and a very elegant lace cap.

"Mrs. Horton, permit me to present my young friend, Mr. Ross Mostyn. Mr. Mostyn, Mrs. Horton," he said.

Gerald bowed deeply. Without rising, the old lady extended her hand, saying cordially—

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Mostyn! Your father and mother were dear friends of mine; and it makes me happy to renew my acquaintance with their son."

"Madam, my parents could not have left me a better legacy than your kind regards," replied Gerald, gallantly.

"Thank you; there, that will do, my young friend; do not stop to waste courtly speeches on an old gentlewoman. Colonel North, take him to the young ladies.

"You made a hit with that last fine speech of yours, my dear fellow," thought the colonel, as he conducted the visitor to a side sofa, where "The Three Graces," as the Misses Horton were called, reclined. Pausing before the first "Grace,"—a wax doll, dressed in pink barege—he said—

"Miss Horton, I take pleasure in presenting to you Mr. Mostyn. Mr. Gerald Mostyn, Miss May Horton."

A gracious smile and bend of the head from the lady—a bow from the gentleman, and the colonel passed on to the next "Grace"—a second wax doll in white—whom he introduced as Miss Lily Horton, and, finally, to the last "Grace"—a third wax doll in pale lilac—whom he introduced as Miss Violet Horton. And then this master of ceremonies presented his guest to Lord Starr, whom he found to be a well-preserved, handsome, and dignified man of fifty; and, lastly, to his son, Captain Starr, a military *elegant* of the first water. These formal introductions over, the colonel conducted Mr. Mostyn to a seat on the sofa, beside Miss Violet, who, though excessively like the other two dolls, had a little more life and variety in her manners. Violet was called either Viola or Lettie, as the taste or caprice of her friends dictated—even as Constance Wynne was

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

sometimes called Constantia, and other times Winnie. But where, then, was Constance? It was with a feeling of the deepest disappointment and misgiving that Gerald Mostyn looked round and missed her.

Happily he had scarcely time to speculate upon the cause of her absence, when the door opened softly, and Constance entered. She advanced with graceful dignity —her head gently thrown back, her eyelids cast down, her dark hair swept off in shining waves from her fair, white forehead, and her snow-white dress falling in classic folds around her perfect form. She greeted the visitors with stately grace.

Gerald's heart bounded to see her. He could not help it—it was magnetism—he sprang to meet her, led her to a seat, and took his place beside her. The very openness of this act blended suspicion to the deep love that was consuming his heart.

But the company was too small to permit any two to indulge in *téte-á-téte*. The conversation *per force*, became general—with one transient exception—Mrs. Horton—catching her brother's eye, signed for him to approach her; and when the colonel found himself by his sister's side, she said—

"I want a few friends here this evening to meet Lord Starr. Now, is there anything serious between our guest, Mr. Ross Mostyn, and his relatives, the Hornes, as to make it improper for me to invite them during his stay?"

"By no means! for though he does not choose to take up his residence among them, yet, by what I understand from himself, they are on polite, if not affectionate terms."

"Very good! I will slip out and write my notes, as there is no time to be lost," said Mrs. Horton, as she quietly withdrew from the room.

Among the company left behind, arose the vexed question of social philosophy, especially that portion of the subject which related to the prevention and cure of evil.

The burden of the argument rested upon Lord Starr, Colonel North, and Mr. Mostyn—each of the three

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

beauties and the young lieutenant occasionally flashing into the conversation with witticisms *apropos* of nothing.

Lord Starr and Colonel North took the conservative side of the question: Mr. Mostyn, single-handed, sustained the liberal. The two elder polemics supported scaffolds, prisons, pillories, and scourges, as reformatory agents. The younger one favoured moral suasion.

Constance said little, but her fine eyes were often turned to Gerald in eager expectation, earnest sympathy, or elequent approval. And he imbibed deep draughts of inspiration from her presence.

The argument was interrupted by the re-appearance of Mrs. Horton; and soon after was entirely ended by the announcement of dinner.

It fell to Gerald's lot to lead Constance to the table; or rather he assumed that privilege, which he would not forego.

After dinner the company wandered out to find cool seats in the arbours or under the green trees that shaded the lawn.

Gerald found himself *tête-á-tête* with Constance under the shadow of a mighty elm.

"You are a student of law, Mr. Mostyn. That study has frequently been pronounced dry. But I will venture to say that *you* do not find it so," said Miss Wynne.

"I certainly do not," replied Gerald, with a look that seemed to ask, "But how did *you* discover that?"

She answered his look.

"I consider the law, as the science of human justice, one of the most interesting subjects of study in the world. Had I been a man, I should, as you have done, adopt that profession."

"That is to say, if you had been, as I am, without fortune, and under the necessity of adopting some profession."

"No! I should in *any* case. Mr. Mostyn, I do not think that any amount of wealth enfranchises a human being from the duty of labouring in *some* department of human industry."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"You are right, Miss Wynne! perfectly right."

"I often wish," said Constance, "that there were some harder work for me than playing at domestic economy; not that I fail to appreciate that good, old-fashioned science; much comfort and happiness depend upon its being well understood and faithfully practiced. But an energetic woman in my circumstances might do all that and have ample time to crave with a mighty hunger some more engrossing occupation. A fortune is positively a *mis*fortune to some women."

"*You* say that, Miss Wynne?"

"I should have made such a good working farmer's or mechanic's daughter! I must continue to play at house-keeping—when Mrs. Horton will permit me—for I find it as hard to get *that* to do as if I had to earn my living by it. But future years will bring their work, for *aspirations are prophecies.*"

"This girl is the woman I dreamed of, long years before I ever saw her face or heard her voice. Oh, surely fate does not mean to mock me in bringing me to her side," thought Gerald, as he listened to the *words* so in harmony with his *thoughts*.

And soon, without egotism on his side, or intrusion on hers, they slid into conversing upon the subject of his history and prospects. And as he talked with her, the loss of his patrimony seemed to dwindle into a matter of the least significance, while his profession and future career arose into a consideration of the utmost importance. So they lingered under the elm-tree, conversing, until the sun sank behind the horizon, and the full moon arose in glory over the mountain tops.

CHAPTER VII.

TELLING FORTUNES BY CARDS.

"TEA is served, Miss Wynne," said old David, bowing before the young couple, who had been too deeply engaged in conversation to hear his

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

approach. The company were moving towards the house, and Constance arose and invited Gerald to follow. The tea-table, draped with snow-white damask, adorned with the Pekin tea-service, and covered with all the delicacies of the season and of good housewifery, stood glittering under the light of a hanging chandelier. Mrs. Horton, very stately in her black velvet dress and elaborate lace cap, stood at the head. On her right-hand side was Lord Starr.

Colonel North stood at the foot. Ladies and gentlemen, arranged alternately, occupied the sides, with the exception of the first and second places on the left-hand of the hostess, which were left for Constance and Gerald. As soon as these latter took their seats, the company, who had been waiting for them, sat down. Each guest was promptly served, and conversation became general and animated. When tea was over, the company adjourned to the drawing-room, where, soon after, the guests invited for the evening joined them. The first arrivals were Mr. and Mrs. Osborne and Mr. Heath. Immediately after them came Dr. and Mrs. James Horne—the doctor a man of great fashion and elegance, the lady a delicate, pensive woman, with a sort of sad, moonlight face, beaming softly out between her fleecy locks of jet.

And to the astonishment of everybody, came old Mr. Horne, who had been invited as a matter of courtesy, and was not expected to make his appearance. The old gentleman was of medium height, and spare habit, slightly bent, yet not without some remaining elegance of form. He had high, thin, aquiline features, and a bald receding forehead, fringed around the temples and the back of the head with silver locks. He was dressed with scrupulous care in a suit of clerical black, relieved by delicate shirt frills, and adorned by a richly-wrought chain. In a word, there was no external sign of the genus miser about the man.

He came not alone. On his arm he brought a young girl, uninvited, but whom, with courtesy, he presented to his hostess as Miss Owen, the daughter of a deceased friend, and now his ward, who had arrived only that

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

morning, and whom, presuming on Mrs. Horton's well-known kindness, he had ventured to present to her. Enough! Thus commended to her consideration, the old gentlewoman received the young maiden, bidding her warmly welcome to Llyndell. The appearance of the young stranger arrested every eye—not only that such an arrival in a quiet country circle always attracts attention, but also that the object was highly likely to excite a sensation.

Alice Owen was a beauty—not of the noble order of Constance Wynne, nor yet of the waxen style of the Misses Horton—but with the glowing, oriental type, of the Asiatic girl. Her figure was *petite*, exquisitely proportioned, and gracefully rounded. Her features were regular and softly moulded; her complexion was of the clearest olive, deepening in the cheeks and lips into the most glowing bloom; her eyes were of the darkest hazel, long-lashed and full of fire; a wealth of sun-bright chestnut curls clustered around her beautiful face. Her dress of deep mourning could not disguise —perhaps it enhanced her voluptuous style of beauty. In a word, she was a girl to inspire at first sight the most ardent passion, if not the most lasting attachment. But she also possessed a latent charm more powerful even than her dark loveliness—it was the undeniable air of goodness and truth, that only appeared to those who intimately conversed with her. Mrs. Horton, a reader of faces, was attracted towards her; and, after a little talk, that confirmed her first favourable impressions, she took the hand of the orphan girl, and conducted her to the group formed by the Misses Horton, Captain Starr, Mr. Heath, Mr. Mostyn, and Miss Wynne. Modest, yet genial, the young stranger glided gracefully into the spirit of the youthful circle to which she was introduced. Under the auspices of Miss May Horton, they were just about to form what she called a Sybil's Circle, for which purpose Messrs. Heath and Starr were dispatched to bring forward a round table. Miss May went to a cabinet to seek the "Sybil's Leaves," which she produced. All the youthful party then seated themselves around the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

table—that is all except Constance, who held back, and Gerald, who seemed to abide her decision.

"Come, Miss Wynne, we await you," spoke Captain Starr.

"Come, Constance, come!" exclaimed May, the destined "Sybil" of the evening.

"I dare not. Even in sport I dare not tempt again the revelation of the future," said Constance to her companion.

Startled at seeing again this one weakness of her otherwise perfect character, Mr. Mostyn smiled. Ah! what power his smile or frown possessed for her!

"I will go," she said; and turning a shade paler, she took her seat at the mystic table. Mr. Mostyn placed himself beside her. A dead silence reigned. May shuffled the cards, turned them with their faces down, and, addressing her right-hand neighbour, Captain Starr, in a low voice, she demanded—

"What would you with the Sybil?"

"I would know the future partner of my life," was the answer.

"Draw!"

The young man hesitated for a while, smiled, and rejecting all those cards that were nearest himself, put his hand under the pack, and withdrew the lowest one.

"Read," he said, extending the card to the Sybil.

"Hear," she exclaimed—

"A widow, beautiful as light,
'Twill be your lot to wed—
With a rich jointure, which shall pour
Its blessings on your head."

There was a general clapping of hands, and shouts of laughter, amid exclamations of—

"A widow!"

"Oh, Captain Starr, who would have thought it!"

"And where will he pick up such a paragon of a wealthy widow?"

"I'll tell you! Dr. Horne will take one of his own prescriptions by mistake one of these days, and then——"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Oh, yes! I've noticed how the captain seems to admire the lady——"

"Surely, ladies, there is no harm in respectful admiration," suggested the young man.

"Oh, certainly not! Especially of brilliant widows!"

"I *hate* young widows!" broke forth the captain.

General laughter followed this promulgation of sentiment.

The hilarity attracted the attention of the elder members of the party, who, growing tired of politics, drew near the group around the table.

"What are we about, young ladies!" questioned Lord Starr.

"Telling fortunes, 'an' it please your lordship," answered Miss Violet. "Stand by and you will see some fun."

"You are to be father-in-law to a widow!" said Miss Lily.

"Won't you try your fortune, sir?" asked Miss May.

"With great pleasure," returned Lord Starr.

"What would you with the Sybil?"

"I would know the future partner of my life."

"Draw!"

Lord Starr drew a card, and handed it up to be read.

"Hear!" exclaimed the Sybil, reading—

——"A miss in her teens."

The laughter arose more wildly than before.

"Oh, dear! A miss in her teens for his wife, and a widow for his daughter-in-law!" exclaimed half-a-dozen voices simultaneously.

"It was now Miss Violet's turn to test her fate. Being a young lady, she would not put the question in the usual form, but merely inquired what should be her future fate. The answer drawn was—

"To dandle fools and chronicle small beer,"

a reply that nearly extinguished Miss Violet for the evening.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"I declare there is old Mr. Horne," exclaimed Violet, as the old miser sauntered to the table, and stood looking with curiosity on the game of the young people.

"Come, Mr. Horne, I declare you shall have your fortune told."

"The fortune of four-score years is well nigh told, young lady."

"Nay, no one's fate is complete while he lives. Draw."

"Well, well, the commands of ladies are not to be disobeyed," replied the old man, gallantly, as he drew a card, which he passed to the Sybil. Amid a profound silence, and in a solemn voice, she read—

"Thy fate looms full of horror. From false friends,
Near at hand, perdition threatens thee!—
A fearful sign stands in thy house of life!—
An enemy—a fiend lurks close behind
The radiance of thy planet.—Oh, be warned!"

"Pshaw! what serious mockery!" exclaimed the old man, as he turned away, and gave place to his nephew, who had been posted behind him, peeping over his shoulder.

"Will you permit me to test my fortune?" inquired the 'fascinating' Dr. Horne.

"And what would *you* with the Sybil?" was the response.

"I would know the future."

"Draw!" said the Sybil, in a tone of assumed sternness.

Smiling his graceful but most sinister smile, the doctor drew a card, and passed it to the reader.

"Hear!" said the latter, lifting the tablet of fate, and reading—

"*I know thee!*—thou fearest the solemn night!
With her piercing stars, and her deep winds' might—
There's a tone in her voice thou fain wouldst shun,
For it asks what the secret soul hath done!
And thou—there's a weight on thine—away—
Back to thy home and pray!"

"Oh, see how pale the doctor has grown," exclaimed Violet. "One would really think to look at him

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

that 'a deep remorse for some unacted crime' preyed on him."

"Nonsense! Jugglery!" said the latter, turning to conceal his disturbance. The eyes of Constance Wynne followed him with interest. There was upon that brow that she had never seen before. The next in course was Alice. Turning to her, May said—

"What seek you in the magic circle, lady?"

"My destiny," answered the luscious tones.

"Invoke the knowledge!"

Alice drew a tablet, and passed it to the Sybil, who read—

"Oh, ask me not to speak thy fate!
Oh, tempt me not to tell,
The doom shall make thee desolate,
The wrong thou mayest not quell!
Away! Away!—for death would be
Even as a mercy unto thee!"

Alice shuddered, and covered her face with her hands.

"I will put up the tablets! They are growing fatal!" said May.

"No, no! indeed, I thank you! It is not fair. There's Constance, and Mr. Heath, and Mr. Mostyn, whose fortune has not been tried yet!" said Lily and Violet.

"Some one else must officiate, then, for I cannot," said May.

"No, no! The Sybil of the beginning must be the Sybil of the end. Besides—now that she is shaken as by a storm—now that the power of the god is upon her, she becomes truly inspired and prophetic—her words are destinies!" exclaimed Mr. Heath, in mock gravity.

"Assuredly," assented the others. And May was forced to resume her seat.

"Your turn is next. Draw, sir!" she said, pushing the tablets towards the last-named gentleman.

Mr. Heath drew a leaf, and passed it to the Sybil, who read—

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"I see the cloud and the tempest near,
The voice of the troubled tide I hear—
Thy bosom's bark on the surge I see,
And wanderer, thy loved one is there with thee!"

"Dark, indeed; as the sayings of the Sybil usually are," said Mr. Heath, smiling ruefully.

"Still foreboding! Oh, let me resign this office!" prayed May.

"Not for the world, now that each word is fate! There is a couple yet to be disposed of. Miss Wynne, draw near," said Mr. Heath.

The cheek of Constance Wynne changed; yet striving with a feeling she felt to be unworthy, she smiled, drew a tablet, and passed it to the Sybil, who, in an effective voice, read—

"A dream is on my soul!
I see a bride—all crowned with flowers, and smiling,
As in delighted visions, on the brink
Of a dread chasm!"

Constance heard in silence, remembering the strange correspondence of these lines with the prediction of the gipsy, endeavouring to convince herself that it was mere coincidence, and vainly trying to subdue the foreboding of her heart.

"Mr. Mostyn," said May, shuffling the tablets, and passing them to him. He drew a card, and returned it to be perused. The Sybil took it, and a thrill of terror shook her frame as she read—

——"Disgrace and ill,
And shameful death are near!"

An irrepressible low cry broke the lips of Constance.

"Throw up the cards!" she said: "it is wicked—this tampering with mysteries of the future!" May swept them from the table, and the circle broke up in a strange dismay.

"She has *one* weakness!" said Gerald, reflecting on this peculiar idiosyncracy of Constance Wynne. "She has one weakness! I am glad of it! It makes her more human—draws her still nearer to me! for, but for that one weakness, she would be perfect!"

Refreshments, now served around, created some

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

diversion among the young people, and gave some occupation to the old. But Constance Wynne could not, during the remainder of the evening, recover her serenity. The company soon broke up. The guests that had been invited for the evening took leave, and departed to ride home by the pleasant moonlight. In bidding his grandson good-night, old Mr. Horne had said—

"I shall expect to see you at the house before your departure for the city, Gerald."

"I thank you, sir," returned the latter, with a bow; for he understood this surly invitation only as a matter of form, and did not dream of an acceptance.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WEALTHY RIVAL REJECTED.

MRS. HORTON had her private opinions concerning the attraction that drew the minister from the cares of state and the circle of a court to this remote country neighbourhood. And ere a week had passed she found her conjectures to be correct. Lord Starr had met Constance Wynne for the first time at the Derby. He had been pleased with her from the first, and his approbation increased with time and reflection. In a word, he had come to Wales with the determination of making her his wife, and he had seized all the opportunities afforded by his visit to advance his suit with the heiress. But Constance was shy, and used all her feminine tact to avoid his society without discourtesy, and to escape his proposal. Gerald Mostyn, with jealous pain, observed this seeking by the one party and avoiding by the other. Constance, to put an end to this state of affairs, one morning gave Lord Starr the interview he so intensely desired and so pertinaciously sought. When, with all the graceful self-possession and grave suavity of a mature courtier, he had declared his admiration of the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

lady, and made her the proffer of his heart and hand, Constance replied—

"I am deeply sensible of the honour your preference confers upon me, Lord Starr, even while I feel constrained to decline it."

"Miss Wynne, permit me to hope that this is not your *final* answer," said his lordship.

"Lord Starr, permit *me* to hope that you will not again compel me to seem ungrateful for the distinction you would confer upon me," replied Constance, very gravely.

"Then I have nothing to hope?"

"Beyond my esteem and gratitude, nothing, Lord Starr," replied Constance firmly. The rejected suitor accepted his fate, and bade a sudden adieu to the lady and her family. But not for a moment was Constance deceived by his suavity. She caught the quickly withdrawn dark, fiery glance of hatred shot beneath his black brows at Gerald Mostyn and at herself; and she felt that the keen eye of jealousy had detected a fact hidden from all but herself.

"There are men," she reflected, "who, being kindly rejected as lovers, may be retained as friends; but this man is not one of these. I have made a mortal enemy of Lord Starr."

In this opinion, certainly, the head of the family coincided.

"Oh, Constance, my child, what have you done? Lord Starr has departed in high displeasure. I see it under all his politeness. Oh, Constance, what have you done?" inquired Mrs. Horton, as she sat alone with her grand-daughter in the parlour.

"Nothing that should disturb the equanimity of his lordship. I have gratefully declined his alliance, that is all."

"Oh, Constance, you have rejected so lofty a position, with all the advantages and emoluments it might have enabled you to heap upon your family and friends! Oh Constance, you have no ambition!" said the old lady.

"On the contrary, my dear grandmother, ambition is

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

my besetting sin. I crave distinction with a sinful craving."

"And yet you rejected this high destiny?"

"The distinction I want must be a personal one—must develop from within me, and must be my own. Should an emperor take me by the hand and seat me beside him upon the throne to share his empire, I should not call that distinction. I should call it an accident, or an emperor's caprice. But should I, striving side by side in the battle of life with one I honoured, win victory and dominion——" Constance paused and caught her breath at the splendour of the future her imagination conjured up.

"Romantic girl! well, you are only eighteen. But oh, Constance, you have not only lost a high position, but you have made a powerful enemy. Child, had you no fear?"

"None. Lord Starr is at least an *honourable* enemy."

"Girl, girl! the enmity that grows from jealousy is *never* honourable; it is secretive, unjust, vindictive, and most to be feared. No man of your race, Constance, need ever expect political preferment of official favour, if Lord Starr has the power to intercept or withhold it."

"Well," said Constance, "as none of my friends are seeking office, they will not be likely to need political advancement, and as none of them have offended against the majesty of the laws, they will not be likely to pray in vain the ministerial clemency."

But, immediately after uttering these last words, the whole aspect of the speaker changed—she paused, grew pale and shuddered. She thought of the gipsy's prophecy.

"Why, Constance, my child, what ails you?" asked the old lady.

"Nothing—a sudden shiver, that is all. There, it is over now," said the young girl, with a great effort regaining her composure. The conversation ceased there, as Mrs. Horton withdrew to attend to her affairs. Ah, before much time had passed, with what bitterness Constance Wynne remembered the girlish scorn with

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

which she had received the idea of ever seeking political advancement, or needing ministerial favour.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DECLARATION OF LOVE.

MUCH relieved by the departure of his powerful rival, Gerald Mostyn continued the favoured and happy guest of Llyndell. Early every morning he rode out with Miss Wynne and her cousins; but before the ride was over he was sure to find himself *tête-à-tête* with Constance, being either in advance or in the rear of the riding-party. During the later hours of the forenoon, he entertained the young ladies by reading aloud to them while they worked at their embroidery frames; but before the reading was over he was almost certain to find himself in confidential discussion with Constance alone, one after another of the girls having withdrawn upon some slight pretext. Why did the Misses Horton act in this manner? First, because, with the quick perception of womanhood, they had seen the growing attachment between Gerald and Constance; secondly, because, with the unreasoning sensibility of girlhood, they sympathized with the lovers; thirdly, because, being themselves worldly, they could feel no possible jealousy of their cousin's handsome though penniless admirer. Thus every facility was afforded Mr. Mostyn for advancing his interests with Constance. Did he avail himself of his opportunities?

Gerald Mostyn did not understand the overweening pride of the heads of the family with whom he sojourned—that pride which, in treating him upon equal terms, ignored the possibility of his aspiration to an alliance with any daughter of the house. He only felt that every rational encouragement was held out to him. He reviewed the circumstances—Mrs. Horton and Colonel North exhibited towards him the greatest kindness and respect. The Misses Horton tacitly recognized him as the suitor of their cousin. Constance

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

reciprocated his regard; he knew it by the "secret sympathy" of their yet unspoken love. Yet still he hesitated. How could he, a poor and struggling young man, venture to propose for the hand of her, the richest heiress in the state, without exposing himself to the charge of mercenary motives, abuse of hospitality, and gross ingratitude? Oh, that Constance were poor or himself rich!

Meanwhile the day of his departure for London drew near. It was the evening previous to the morning of his intended departure. Mrs. Horton and Colonel North had retired. The young people were promenading on the vine-shaded porch in front of the house. But one by one they dropped off into the drawing-room, until, as usual, Gerald Mostyn found himself alone with Constance Wynne. Their conversation upon different matters had died out — each being indisposed to speak upon the subjects that concerned neither. The near departure of Gerald occupied the thoughts and oppressed the hearts of both. An almost irresistible impulse tempted him to tell her of the love that filled his heart, and the scruples that withheld him from asking her hand. But then he thought such conduct would give him the appearance of throwing himself upon her generosity, an attitude not to be thought of for an instant.

"No! no!" he mentally exclaimed, "though my heart swells to bursting, I must be silent! silent!"

Meanwhile Constance, her hand trembling upon his arm, read his soul as an open book. Her deep love made her feel the profundity of his passion—her own delicate sense of honour made her understand the fastidiousness of his scruples. Could her secret prayer have annihilated those scruples, they would have disappeared. But she—a maiden—might pray, but must not breathe aloud the meaning of her prayer—no! not to save both their hearts from life-long misunderstanding and estrangement. And he, knowing this, would he, could he depart, without using his masculine privilege of confessing his love, so that her own, unblamed, might meet and bless it? Was there no innocent

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

womanly wile by which she might beguile from him the words he longed to speak, she longed to hear, yet which he ventured not to utter? She thought of Desdemona, and of Juliet, who met their lovers considerably more than half-way. But there was something in her nature that repelled the first suggestion of artifice. In its simple, majestic truth, her mind resembled the Ionic column — pure, white, stately, upright, unswerving. She could even more easily have said—"Gerald, speak to me, for I love you,"—than she would have used any feminine arts to draw such a declaration from him.

While these thoughts and feelings occupied the lovers, they pursued their walk up and down the vine-shaded porch. They continued to walk on in silence, her hand trembling upon his arm, its motion felt and re-echoed from his heart. Feeling the temptation to clasp her to his bosom, and pour the history of his love into her ear, growing every instant stronger, becoming almost irresistible, and wishing to preserve his integrity, he resolved to put an immediate period to the interview. Pausing in his promenade, he said—

"Miss Wynne, forgive my thoughtlessness, I have detained you too long exposed to the damp evening air."

"Oh, no, no," began Constance; but her tones vibrated as the chords of an æolian harp when swept by the wind, and died away in silence.

"Permit me to lead you in and to bid you—farewell?"

"Farewell!" she echoed—"Oh, surely not yet, farewell? We shall see you to-morrow morning?"

"Ah, no! Colonel North has kindly placed a horse and groom at my service, and I depart at daybreak to meet the train at Bleakton," he answered, as he led her towards the hall-door. Arrived there, he paused, took her hand respectfully, and held it while he said—

"Constance, permit me to thank you for all the kindness you have shown towards 'a poor, wayfaring' young man,—to acknowledge most gratefully all the faith, hope, and strength with which you have inspired him,—to bless you, Constance, and to say—farewell for ever!"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

He lifted her hand to his lips, pressed upon it a burning kiss, resigned it, and turned away.

"*Gerald!*" It was only his name, breathed in a low voice by Constance Wynne; but all the deep, passionate emotion of her soul vibrated along its syllables.

> "Oh, there are looks and tones that dart,
> An instant sunshine through the heart,
> As if the soul that moment caught
> A something it through life had sought!"

"Constance! Constance!" he responded. He was at her feet in an instant. And then and there the sealed fountain of love was set free. He told her all—his youthful dream of the ideal woman who should be the companion of his life; his meeting with her in the church; his recognizing her as his ideal; his mistaking her, through the simplicity of her dress and manner, for some poor though noble girl, whom he resolved to seek out and woo; his despair on discovering her to be an heiress; his vain struggle with his growing love; his final resolution to depart without declaring his feelings; and that little touch of true nature which had melted the seal of silence from his heart. She heard him out, and broke forth in eloquent reply. She asked how it was possible that he, understanding her nature as he claimed to do, should suppose her capable of misconstruing his motives; or how it happened that he, indifferent to accidents of fortune as he professed to be, should yet affix so much importance to her possession of wealth as to make that circumstance an obstacle to a good understanding between them?

He smiled, and said—"Your straightforward, trenchant nature, noble girl, would cut the gordian knot, rather than untie it. Well, dearest Constance, all that I have to offer you, is an *upright* heart that has never swerved from rectitude; a *fresh* heart that has never before bowed before the shrine of womanhood; a *constant* heart through good or ill, for time and eternity, that is wholly yours. Years may pass before I shall be in a position to claim this coveted hand; and to ask you to contract yourself in so long and uncertain an engagement would be ungenerous; therefore, dearest

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Constance, while I bind myself irrevocably to you as my liege lady, I would fain leave you unfettered by any promise."

"As if I would consent to so one-sided and unjust an engagement! No, Gerald, my nature demands that every engagement to which I may be a party must be justly proportioned, clearly defined, well understood. I am not yet my own mistress. I am a minor, and belong to my grandmother and uncle. I could not, under any circumstances, marry without their consent. Go to them to-morrow, dear Gerald, and make known our engagement, and solicit their sanction."

"You permit me to do this, dear, candid girl?

"Duty commands us to take this straightforward course, dear Gerald! But now it is time we should separate for the evening. Good-night. I will not say good-bye!"

"Good-night; may all good angels guard and bless you, noble girl—dearest Constance!" he exclaimed, pressing her hand to his lips, and then handed her through the hall door.

And Constance sought her pillow, not to sleep—but to lie dreaming "love's young dream." And for hours longer Gerald paced the vine-shaded porch in a trance of joy, then sought his couch to dream of—Constance.

CHAPTER X.

SUCCESS IN BUSINESS.

IN the morning, according to orders, David rapped at the chamber-door, waking Mr. Mostyn from a delicious dream of going to housekeeping with Constance. Gerald sprang out of bed, and admitted his early attendant.

"Well, is this you, David?"

"Yes, please sur; and here's hot water to shave, and day's broke, and your coffee's waiting, and the horses, too!"

"Well, David, let the horses be put back into the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

stable. I shall not go this morning. But tell me, what time does the colonel rise?"

"About an hour from this, sur."

"Very well. Let them know down-stairs that I shall not go this morning; and do you come to me at the end of an hour from this to take a note to the colonel."

"Yes, sur," said the man, departing.

Gerald proceeded to make his toilet, and afterwards to write a note, explaining that circumstances had arisen to delay his departure for a few hours, and begging the favour of an interview with Colonel North, at the earliest convenience of the latter. Colonel North returned a verbal answer, to the effect that he would be happy to see Mr. Mostyn in his study directly after breakfast. Soon after receiving this reply, Gerald went downstairs and joined the family at their morning meal. Mrs. Horton expressed her satisfaction at having the pleasure of her guest's company for some time longer; and the young ladies rallied him unmercifully for losing his journey, as they said, by oversleeping himself. Constance, calm, simple, and stately, neither said nor did anything to betray herself. Colonel North, moved by curiosity to know what the young gentleman could have to say to him in private, and far from suspecting the truth, was the first to retire from the breakfast-room. His study was the front room on the second floor, over the entrance hall. Thither Gerald repaired, to find the colonel awaiting him. The old gentleman rose and tendered a seat. The young man declined it with a bow, and standing before his host, opened the subject of his visit. In a dignified manner, he declared his love for Constance Wynne, and his desire to make her his wife. Colonel North sank back in his chair, and gazed up at Gerald Mostyn with astonishment. That *he*, a poor student of law, should aspire to the hand of Constance Wynne; that he should venture to confess such a flagrant presumption; that he should dare to request him, her guardian, to sanction such high audacity, struck him with consternation. He sat perfectly silent, and staring at the suitor. Under that

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

regard of arrogant amazement, Gerald Mostyn felt his high spirit rising.

"Well, Colonel North, I await your answer," he said.

But the colonel stared on, in blank panic, finding no terms in which to reply. Mr. Mostyn was losing his patience. Nevertheless, he controlled himself, and, after a moment, said, quietly,

"Colonel North, I beg to remind you, sir, that I have just had the honour to lay before you certain proposals, authorized by Miss Wynne, and which await your answer."

"My answer, sir! Sir, I am astonished! I am overwhelmed with consternation, sir! Constance Wynne, sir? Do you happen to know who she *is*, sir? Are you aware of her social position, sir? of her high pretensions, sir? of her brilliant prospects, sir?"

"Colonel North, I am fully aware of all the circumstances which you have taken the pains to bring to my recollection. Furthermore, I know Miss Wynne; and knowing, love her; and loving, desire to make her my wife," said the young man with courtesy.

"Then, sir, I can only repeat that I am amazed, sir! —yes, sir, astounded, sir!—yes, sir, thunderstruck at your effrontery!"

"Permit me to recall to you, Colonel North, the fact that Miss Wynne herself has authorized the proposals that I have the honour to submit to you."

"Sir, you leave me *without words* to express myself."

"Pardon me for observing that that is no answer to my proposal. Allow me to state it afresh: I love your ward, Miss Wynne, I request your sanction to my engagement with her; and I attend for your answer," said Gerald Mostyn, with great dignity.

"My answer, sir! You cannot for a moment be at a loss for it, sir. Marry Constance Wynne, sir? No, sir! *assuredly not*, sir! *most assuredly not*, sir! I tell you that —that I stand appalled at the question!"

"Very well! having received a distinct answer, I have only to wish you good morning, colonel," said the young man, bowing ironically. Colonel North now in some degree recovered himself, and recollected what

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

became him as a host, and what was due to Mr. Mostyn as his guest. Rising, he said somewhat sarcastically—

"Yes, sir! Miss Wynne's family feel highly honoured by the flattering proposal you have made them; and they regret for many cogent reasons they should be forced to decline the *distinction* you designed them. Good morning, sir," the colonel concluded, abruptly, seeing that Mr. Mostyn, deeply disgusted, was not disposed to endure the continuation of his speech. Gerald bowed once more, and withdrew. Assured of Constance's love, he cared little for her guardian's opposition. A few years, he knew, if they did not bring Colonel North to a more rational view of the case, would enfranchise Constance from his authority. With these hopeful feelings he went downstairs and sought her presence. As his 'audacious proposal' had not yet been mentioned in the family, no opposition was made to their meeting. He found Constance in the midst of her cousins, in the sitting-room. He greeted the ladies, and took his seat among them; and for a while all conversed pleasantly. But presently Miss Violet called Miss May to help her bind up a honeysuckle vine that was drooping from the porch, and Miss Lily volunteered to render her assistance also; and, as usual, Constance and Gerald were left *tête-à-tête*. He went to her side, and took her hand. She looked up inquiringly into his face. He smiled mournfully.

"Well, Gerald?"

"Well, dearest Constance, I this morning availed myself of your permission to lay my hopes before Colonel North."

"And the result?"

"Was what we might have anticipated—a rejection of my suit." Gerald refrained from saying how insulting this rejection had been.

"Well, what matters it? It was our duty to have no concealment from my guardian, but to make known to him our purposes. I expected his opposition; it is of no real importance; for though while I am rightfully under his authority, I will obey him, yet, when I am

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

my own mistress, I shall follow the dictates of my own mind. In two years from next Christmas I shall have reached my legal majority, shall be mistress of myself and of my fortune. At the end of that time, dear Gerald, you will claim me as your wife; and until that time regard me as your betrothed!" she said, and held out her hand. He caught and pressed it to his heart. Then he took from around his neck a black ribbon with a gold ring attached to it.

"This, dear Constance, was my mother's wedding-ring. She, in dying, placed it on my finger, and bade me wear it until I should transfer it to my betrothed. I wore it on my hand until my finger outgrew it, then I attached it to this ribbon, and wore it round my neck. Will you let me now obey my mother's behest, and place it upon the finger of my betrothed?"

"Yes; and the pledge shall be as sacred as if placed there in the church by the minister of God," said Constance, holding out her left hand. He slipped the ring on the third finger, lifted the lovely hand to his lips for an instant, and resigned it.

"Constance, I may write to you?" he inquired.

"Assuredly, unless our correspondence should be forbidden by my guardian, in which case we must submit and be patient. The years will wear around at last."

Again her hand was lifted, and pressed to his lips, and dropped abruptly, for lo! Mrs. Horton, with severe aspect, appeared within the door—Mrs. Horton, who had just learned from Colonel North "the audacious proposals of Mr. Mostyn." She entered, nodding stiffly, took her seat, drew her knitting work from her pocket, and began silently to ply her needles. No more opportunity of private conversation was afforded the lovers.

In half an hour from that time Gerald Mostyn had bade adieu to the family; and declining the offer of a horse and groom, set out to walk to Bleakton, which he reached by noon, and whence he sent a messenger to Llyndell to fetch his luggage. And by the next morning's train, Mr. Mostyn journeyed towards London,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

which he reached in due time. It had been agreed between Mrs. Horton and Colonel North that it would be the best policy to refrain from mentioning to Constance the subject of her discarded lover, that he might be the more easily forgotten. Thus Constance was left in peace. And when the next mail brought her a letter from Gerald, with several other epistles, for Constance had an extensive correspondence among her late schoolmates, it escaped notice. And when she answered it, and gave the answer, with other similar-looking missives, into the hands of the messenger, the act escaped comment. In short, though Constance disdained to make a secret of the fact, yet, either because her guardians did not know of its existence, or that they did not think it politic to draw the chains of authority too tightly around her, or because they had confidence in her integrity, or for whatever reason, it is certain that the correspondence was not interfered with. By every Monday's mail she received a letter from her lover; and by every Thursday's mail she replaced it. Their letters were faithful transcripts of their daily lives. Thus Constance knew and shared the labours, hopes, and aspirations of Gerald at his chambers; and Gerald enjoyed with Constance the sweetness of her rural days.

* * * * * *

We will not weary our readers by narrating the struggles of Gerald Mostyn up the thorny steep of fame. It is enough for our purpose to say, that in two years from the time of his first admission to practice in the courts, he was known as a highly talented and rising young lawyer. In the commencement of the third year of his professional career, he was retained by the defendants in a civil suit of importance, upon the issue of which immense wealth pended, and in which the highest legal talent of the kingdom was on either side opposed. Mr. Mostyn, in addition to his other advantages, possessed the supreme one of faith in the justice of client's cause. Some of the most renowned lawyers, whose names grace the nation's

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

councils, were his colleagues. Their speeches—models of judicial oratory—preceded his own. But he had the reviewing of the case—the closing speech. And his address to the jury was not only a masterpiece of legal knowledge, sound logic, and moving eloquence: it was an overwhelming power, a magnificent triumph!

Without leaving their seats, the jury returned a verdict for the defendants. And all knew that the cause was saved by this splendid young orator, who had burst as a new sun upon the world. His success was an ovation. His brother lawyers gathered around him with congratulations. Briefs crowded in upon him; gold flowed to his coffers; and his clients—widows and orphans saved from ruin—blessed him in their nightly prayers. In all this, of what did he think most frequently? Constance! Constance! for *her* his bays were won!

In his regular correspondence with her the subject of the pending trial was occasionally mentioned; but when it closed with such glorious victory for him, he alluded to the event only slightly and modestly, until, at last, Constance wrote to him—

"*Your praises reach me from an hundred quarters. Oh,* churl! *to deny me the rightful share in your triumphs! I enjoin you to send me a full report of that trial, with your closing speech.* Dry, *do you call it! I will have it all—to the utmost syllable! I will not be defrauded of a single 'whereas' or 'aforesaid.' And while you are making up the packet, send me also the paper containing the account of the public dinner that was given you by the members of the bar. Ah! you see that your Constance is exacting—she will not be deprived of an atom of her dues!*"

More than all the plaudits of the world he prized this letter. He pressed it to his lips; he wore it next to his heart. Meanwhile, for him, success followed success with rapidity. He would not touch an unjust cause; but a just one in his hands was sure of triumph. At the close of the court term, he turned his attention to politics. He embraced the interests of the liberal party, and as his person, fame, and eloquence, became known

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

to the people, his name was caught up and advanced as a candidate for the House of Commons; and, borne on the tide of popular favour, he was elected to represent the borough of Wilton in Parliament. About this time he renewed, by letter, his proposals for the hand of Miss Wynne; but, notwithstanding his brilliant success, he was again, upon the ground of his want of fortune, rejected by her guardian. But now an event was approaching destined to change the whole current of his future life.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RICH OLD MAN'S RELENTING.

OUR narrative now approaches one of those awful events that not unfrequently, in this world of ours, fall, electrifying a calm neighbourhood with terror. The brilliant success of Gerald Mostyn had produced its natural effect upon his churlish relative, old Hugh Horne, dwelling in his lonely home at Horne's Hole. Now, whether the old man's mind was failing, or from whatever cause it might have been, he did not act with his habitual caution in expressing his sentiments; but to his frequent visitor, Dr. Horne, he would often say—"Ah, ha! that puppy Mostyn is turning out better than one could have expected, eh?"

"Hem-m! let us hope that it is so, sir; but adventurers are unreliable persons," would be the reply of the doctor. Whereupon old Hugh Horne would secretly turn on his nephew a keen glance, reading his soul. At another time he said—

"Bravo, James! I congratulate you. *Your cousin* Gerald is getting on. His gaining of the Goldsborough suit is said to be one of the greatest triumphs of the season."

"Hem-m, yes, sir; though I should think that reckless young man as likely to *die* by the law, as to *live* by it," returned Dr. Horne.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Take care, lad! 'Evil prophecies, like chickens, often come home to roost!'"

Again, a few months after, he exclaimed—

"Ha, James, wish me joy! *My grandson*, Mr. Mostyn, has been elected to a seat in the House of Commons. He will be a distinguished man yet!"

"This old wretch is getting into his dotage. He must be taken care of, or to the demon with my prospects of being his heir. If this goes on a month longer, he will destroy the will he has made in my behalf, and make another in favour of the precious grandson, or die intestate, in which case this 'all-praised' Gerald is heir-at-law," thought Dr. Horne, but he replied—

"I do, from the bottom of my heart, congratulate you, sir, on an event that none of us had any reason to anticipate; and I hope it may end happily. I must in all candour confess that his sudden abandonment of his legitimate profession for a political career, does not speak well for his stability of purpose."

With another keen glance, the old man perused the speaker's thoughts as the lines of a printed page. From the evening upon which this conversation occurred, Hugh Horne's health of mind and body declined. Dr. Horne redoubled his attentions to the invalid, and reported everywhere that his days were numbered, that no medicine could prolong his life. Affairs went on in this manner for some weeks longer, when old Hugh Horne, with the caprice of illness, dismissed his nephew from professional attendance upon him, and declared that none should prescribe for him except young Mr. Heath, who had lately received his diploma as a practitioner. The reason given by the old man for this step was that a change of physicians and of treatment was often good for the ailing; and to soothe the smarting of this wound to Dr. Horne's self-love, he said that he should always be happy to see his nephew, "as a friend, unprofessionally." But Dr. Horne, in his mortification, let fall some words of complaint that provoked from the sick man the astounding retort of—

"Sir, I would be attended by a medical man who is

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

not too deeply interested in my *death*." Silenced by this reply, which the doctor professed to ascribe to the infatuations of dotage, he repressed all evidences of his feeling of humiliation, and, taking the old man at his former word, continued to visit him as a friend. Every one who heard of this change of doctors, ascribed the conduct of old Hugh Horne to the caprice of dotage, and characterized the act as one of extreme injustice, for Dr. Horne's acknowledged skill as a physician was only equalled by his personal popularity. But strangely enough, and doubtless from another caprice of nature—from the day of Dr. Horne's dismissal, the old man, under the care of Doctor Heath, and the tender nursing of Alice Owen, rapidly convalesced. And not only restoration of health to mind and body, but regeneration of spirit, seemed possible for this octogenarian forgetter of God. His better thoughts were mainly due to the sweet influence of his orphan ward. Daily and nightly the prayers of Alice ascended for the old man, for whom no other living creature prayed,—that time might be granted him to prepare for the great change; that the root of bitterness might be drawn from his heart; that he might be led to "repentance not to be repented of;" that his soul might be saved alive. In her pious efforts, this follower of the Saviour was aided by Mr. Heath and by Mr. Osborne, who, at the old man's desire, came often to see him. Old as Mr. Horne was, it was pitiable to witness his anxiety to get well, and to live longer.

"I am eighty-two years old, but I am so much better that—who knows?—I may live to be ninety-two, or even an hundred. If I could live twenty years longer, how hard I should work to unravel the web of evil I have woven; but it is in vain to hope it, and if I were to give my body to be burned, I could not give satisfaction!" he said despairingly, to Alice, for only to that girl did he speak with freedom.

"Oh, sir," she replied, "you know that our Heavenly Father accepts the disposition for the deed. Sincere repentance is the only satisfaction we can any of us ever make, and it is received of our Lord, whose mercy

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

is greater than all our needs. Meanwhile winter approached, and the old man's physical health fluctuated unfavourably, while his spiritual continued to improve.

At a distance, important events, interesting to other members of his family, were progressing. Parliament met, and the maiden speech of the Honourable Gerald Mostyn upon the income tax electrified the country with its power. In his arm-chair, in his sick chamber at Horne's Hole, old Mr. Horne heard the report of this great triumph, and put on his spectacles to read the speech.

"That boy knew what he was about when he went to Oxford. He was right and I was wrong! A hard admission for an old man of eighty-two to make, eh, Alice? Alice, I do desire to be at peace with all men. Write to Mr. Mostyn, and desire him, from me, to come down, if he should have time, at Christmas, and spend the week with his old grandfather at Horne's Hole."

The girl joyfuliy obeyed, and the letter was written, and was, that same forenoon, despatched to Bleakton post-office. In due time the answer arrived. Mr. Mostyn could not say whether he could stay a week at Christmas; but he would come down, if it were only for one day. Satisfied with this promise, the old man became tranquil, and now another letter came announcing to him that Mr. Mostyn would arrive at the Hole on the night of Christmas-eve; that he would spend Christmas-day with Mr. Horne, but that he should be obliged to set out on his return to town on the morning of the twenty-sixth. This prospect of soon seeing his grandson filled the heart of the failing man with delight. And he pitied his old favourite, Dr. Horne, and imparted his sentiments to Alice Owen, saying—

"My dear, I am afraid that I have been at heart unjust to poor James, and if so, how *very* unjust. I distrust my judgment. Better to err on the side of charity, is it not? I must have a candid interview with him, put things upon a right footing, and have my purpose understood. Write a note, and ask James to

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

come over here as soon as possible, for I am anxious to see him."

Alice complied, and the note was despatched by a messenger. After an absence of two hours, the man returned with the answer that Dr. Horne was absent, and would not be home again for several days, but that he had left the note with Mrs. Horne. Dr. Horne reached home on the evening of the twenty-third of December, and on the morning of the next day—Christmas-eve—he hastened to Horne's Hole to obey the call of the old man. The uncle and nephew were closeted for several hours in a confidential interview, at the end of which Dr. Horne came out of the chamber with a gloomy brow, and rode home. That same night, according to appointment, Gerald Mostyn arrived. The old man welcomed him with cordial friendship, had a confidential conversation with him, detaining him in his chamber until long after midnight, and until Gerald, fearing to injure him by keeping him from sleep, insisted upon retiring to his room. The next day being Christmas, and genial weather for the season, old Mr. Horne was dressed, and wheeled out to the parlour that adjoined his chamber, which was situated on the ground-floor; he wished to meet his family—what were left of them—once more at a Christmas dinner-table. There were present Dr. and Mrs. Horne, Mr. Mostyn, and Alice Owen. It was scarcely a merry Christmas feast; the old man was, perhaps, as cheerful as any of the others; Dr. Horne's hilarity was too hollow to be contagious, and his wife saw and sympathized with his disturbance; Gerald Mostyn's thoughts were absent with Constance Wynne; and Alice Owen, whose gentle nature was all too subject to receive its colouring from the mood of those around her, sat silent and pensive. As the mountain pass was bad between Horne's Hole and Radnor's Ruin, and as the afternoons were short, it was necessary that, after dinner, the doctor and his wife should set out for home. After they had departed, the old man, and Gerald Mostyn and Alice Owen, gathered around the fire, and the three felt, in the absence of the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

others, a great weight lifted from their spirits. The hours were passed in cheerful conversation, until Alice went out to order supper; for it was necessary that the last meal should be early served, as the old man, greatly fatigued, was anxious to retire to bed, and Mr. Mostyn was under the necessity of leaving the same night for Bleakton, to catch the train for London.

When the meal was over, the servants were brought together, and at the request of old Mr. Horne, Gerald Mostyn conducted the evening family worship.

"I wish you would see me in my bed before you depart, Gerald," entreated the old man, who seemed to cling to the presence of his grandson.

"With pleasure, sir," replied Mr. Mostyn, rising to assist the old man.

"Good night, my dear Alice! God bless and reward you for all your goodness!" he said, pressing the hand of his nurse.

"Not good night yet, sir. I shall look in before retiring, to see that you are quite comfortable."

"Thank you, my dear," said Mr. Horne, as leaning on the arm of his grandson, he passed from the parlour into his chamber. Gerald assisted him in undressing, helped him into bed, and arranged his pillows and covering comfortably. Then, at the old man's request, he sat beside him, and conversed until the clock struck ten, when he arose to take leave, and, with a promise to return at the first opportunity and spend a week at the Hole, he shook hands with his grandfather, left the room, bade Alice good-by, and rode off for Bleakton. After his departure, Alice passed into her guardian's room, according to promise, to see if he was comfortable. The old man was lying so quietly, with his eyes closed and his hands folded on his breast, that she thought he was sleeping. But he was awake, and as she approached, he opened his eyes, and said—

"I am not asleep, Alice, my dear."

"Can I do anything for you, sir?" she inquired, gently.

"No, my child."

"How do you feel after your fatiguing day?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Better than for a long time past, dear; better in the spirit, as well as in the flesh. Alice, I feel *satisfied*—I feel as if the Lord had accepted my late repentance."

"Doubtless he has, dear sir. Are you wakeful? if so, shall I sit beside you and read or sing you to sleep?"

"Thank you. I am not wakeful, but inclined to sleep; nevertheless, you may sit by me for a few minutes, and sing your favourite hymn—

'I would not live alway.'"

Alice commenced in a tender key, to sing those beautiful but too pensive stanzas. The singing occupied no more than five or six minutes, and by the time the hymn was finished, the old man was in a placid sleep. She stooped over him to assure herself of this. His eyes were calmly closed; his lips gently compressed; his hands folded as in prayer; his whole aspect serene as that of sleeping infancy.

"May the Lord bless the poor old man," murmured Alice, as she glided from the room, and closed the door. The fires were all out, the servants were retired to their room; the house was solitary, silent, and gloomy. Alice secured the doors and windows, and ascended to her room, which was over that of old Hugh Horne. She offered up her devotions, and then retired to bed.

But for some strange reason she could not sleep; never had the solitude, silence, and gloom of the old house so oppressed her spirits. It was a starless and cloudy winter night, and the sighing of the wind through the mountain gorges, and among the old rafters of the roofs, sounded like the prophetic wailings of some household spirit. A vague presentiment of approaching evil, a deep impression of some atrocious agency drawing near, a dark overshadowing of some impending horror, weighed upon her soul; a wild impulse to start up, to cry out, to fly from the lonely house, assailed her. In vain she reasoned, prayed, and struggled to subdue this agitation of her spirits; for hours she turned and turned in wakeful terrors, or tossed about in frightful dreams. It must have been

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

some time after midnight when she fell into the sleep of exhaustion from which she was terribly shocked—shocked by a prolonged, appealing cry, that rang through the house, and out on the silent night!

CHAPTER XII.

MURDER OF HUGH HORNE.

WITH that appalling cry ringing in her ear, Alice sprang out of bed and stood upon the floor, shaking from head to foot. Was it a dream?—the fearful shriek, pealing out upon the night, and suddenly stifled as by suffocation? For an instant that seemed an age she remained with every nerve acute with attention. But all around her—the room, the house, the neighbourhood, were silent as death, and dark as the grave! From the black night without, no ray of starlight came through the windows. In the death-like stillness of the house no sound stirred. Yes—hark! a voice that does but make the silence of the house and the hour the more dreadful, for it speaks of the loneliest time of the night!—it is the voice of the old-fashioned clock, in the corner of the hall below-stairs, as it slowly strikes—ONE—TWO! This is the very "witching hour of night," for at midnight many people are yet astir, but at two o'clock the stillness of the world is like the stillness of a vault. Then almost to a minute, two hours after midnight, rang out that terrific shriek, that had not yet ceased to vibrate through her ear, and brain, and heart! All was again silent as the tomb. Yet Alice shook as with an ague fit, and the cold sweat of terror broke out upon her forehead. In one moment that seemed an eternity all the fearful features of her position started up before her. A young, timid girl, alone after midnight in an old house in a fissure of the mountains. The servants attached to the premises all buried in sleep in their distant apartments. No cry from that lone house could reach their ears, or reaching,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

could rouse them from their death-like sleep. What could be done? While she thought—

Hark! Heaven of heavens—what sound was that? A low, subdued, floundering struggle, a half-suffocated groan, and a fall! It came from the room immediately under her own — from the chamber of old Hugh Horne.

Paralysed with terror, she stood for a moment, and then, at the thought of danger, of death, to the helpless old man below, all personal fear was conquered. Quickly striking a light, she hurried from the room out into the passage-way, down the windy staircase, and through the lower hall into the parlour. So far all was yet dark and still—the rays of her taper making the darkness more "visible," the faint echo of her footsteps making the silence more apparent. She paused an instant in the parlour, which remained so exactly as it had been left, looked so quiet, wore such an aspect of domestic peace, that she could imagine no unholy disturbance near, and was almost persuaded to believe her alarm to have been a mere nightmare dream. She opened the connecting door between the parlour and Mr. Horne's chamber, and there——! Heavens and earth! what a vision was that which met her gaze, froze the very blood in her veins, and almost turned her form to stone! Down on his face, with his limbs doubled under him as no living man's ever were, and his hair wet with blood, lay old Hugh Horne on the chamber floor. Spots of blood were tracked from the bed to the window, and thence to the door. Five fingers of an outstretched, bloody hand, as if suddenly dashed there, were marked upon the whitewashed wall! Signs of a dread struggle for life were visible everywhere about the room.

Simultaneously with this awful spectacle, the panic-stricken girl caught a glimpse of the figure of a man escaping through the open window! For one instant she stood transfixed with horror, and then—rushing to the old man, she raised the gray head, that helplessly fell back upon her arm, revealing the ghastly gash

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

across the throat, and the pale, ashen face, quivering in the last death-agony!

"Oh, God—my God! who hath done this?" she cried.

The convulsive eyelids flared back, the twitching lips opened, and in spasmodic syllables uttered a name that deprived Alice of the last remnant of reason—then closed for ever in death. Bursting from the room, she rushed out into the night, waking all the mountain echoes with her screams. In five minutes the farm labourers were aroused, and in seven they were on the scene of action. The party consisted of Mr. Hayhurst, the steward, and all the servants, men and women. They hurried into the chamber of the tragedy, and then ensued a scene that baffles all description. Old servants knelt over their dead master, mourning and weeping with despair. Women screamed in terror. Some of the women wished to raise the murdered man and lay him upon his bed, but Mr. Hayhurst forbade them to move him or to meddle with anything in the room until the arrival of the coroner. Then the steward proceeded to send a mounted messenger to fetch Dr. Horne; another to Llyndell to request the presence of Colonel North; a third to Bleakton to summon the coroner, and a fourth to the village inn to bring Mr. Mostyn, if he should not as yet have started on his journey. So far the course of Hayhurst was as judicious as it could be. Each summons sent was quickly complied with, and the parties arrived as promptly as time and distance would permit them to do. First came Colonel North, who reached the scene at about four o'clock; a few moments after him Gerald Mostyn, pale and horror-stricken at what had occurred; then arrived Dr. Horne, who appeared overwhelmed with sorrow and indignation; and last of all the coroner, with a number of men from the village, whom he had summoned to act as jurymen. Then, a few minutes after sunrise, the jury was empannelled, and the investigation began. The premises were examined and the witnesses summoned. First Alice Owen was called; but she was not in the room, nor in the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

house, nor in the steward's cottage, nor in any of the labourer's huts, nor anywhere about the premises, where she was long and vainly sought. While the messengers were in quest of her, other witnesses were examined.

Gerald Mostyn was called, who testified to leaving the deceased in his usual state, comfortably in bed at ten o'clock the previous night; the only other person to his knowledge in the house at that time being Alice Owen. Mr. Mostyn further deposed that having left a valuable document behind in the house, and having missed the paper on his arrival at Bleakton, he was hastening back to recover it when he was met by the messenger with the news of the murder. The next witness was Dr. Horne, who testified to no fact of importance. He had, at four o'clock the day previous, left the deceased in his usual poor health, and in company with his grandson, Mr. Mostyn, and his ward, Miss Owen.

The third witness who was called to give evidence was the old overseer, Mr. Hayhurst, who deposed that soon after two o'clock in the morning, he had been roused from sleep by a violent knocking at his door, accompanied by the most appalling shrieks: that he had started up and opened the door, when in rushed Alice Owen in a state bordering on distraction! that he gathered, rather from her terrified looks and frantic exclamations than from any connected story, that her guardian had been assassinated in his chamber; that accompanied by the farm labourers, who came hurrying up, he hastened to the house, where he found the deceased lying murdered, the window open, and all the things in the same state in which afterwards the coroner also found them; that he had lost no time in summoning the proper persons. Mr. Hayhurst was the last person examined; for the others were incapable of giving evidence, and the only other witness, Alice Owen, could not be found. So after another hour passed in sifting the testimony and examining the mute evidence of the still life in the chamber, the jury made up their verdict:

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Hugh Horne was murdered by a person or persons unknown."

And as it was then ten o'clock, the coroner and his jury dispersed in quest of breakfast to their homes. Gerald Mostyn, as heir-at-law, remained in the house and took the direction of affairs. At his invitation, Dr. Horne stayed to assist him. Even Colonel North, forgetting his former antagonism, or remembering that Mr. Mostyn was possibly now the heir of millions, kindly offered his services, which Gerald, for Constance's sake, accepted. But before noon that day the news of the murder was widely spread, and the whole community thrilled as with one heart at the perusal of the tale. Late in the afternoon Alice Owen was found wandering in the woods in a state of fever and delirium. She had rambled far from home, and was picked up in the neighbourhood of the parsonage, where Mrs. Osborne took her in and nursed her. On the fourth day from that of his death, the funeral of Hugh Horne took place. It was attended by a larger concourse of people than had ever assembled in that part within the memory of man. They were drawn together by the interest of the occasion. After the funeral, upon the asseveration of Dr. Horne and Mr. Sprole, the Bleakton lawyer, that a will had been made in favour of the former, the alleged instrument was everywhere sought, but in vain. No will of any description was to be found. And after considerable delay, Gerald Mostyn entered as heir-at-law into his possessions. Not wishing to alienate his patrimonial estate of Radnor's Ruin, he warned the tenant, Dr. Horne, that at the close of his term of lease he should be required to give up the premises. But at the same time Gerald Mostyn acted with magnanimity, and gave his cousin a deed of Horne's Hole with the farm attached. Besides this gift, Mr. Mostyn would have settled a comfortable independence upon Alice Owen, who, by the death of her guardian, was left destitute. But the orphan girl, without making the slightest acknowledgment of the kindness of that intention, and with deep horror, refused to accept the least assistance from him.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Everyone who knew of this event thought her manner of refusing aid from him ungracious; but they attributed it to nervous excitement, and excused her upon her recent illness, while—Alice—shuddered and kept her own counsel. But Mr. Gerald Ross Mostyn was now an eminent character. As a rising statesman, a wealthy capitalist and a landed aristocrat, he was considered a desirable match even for Miss Constance Wynne, and before his return to London he was invited to dinner by her proud uncle. Then again, he met his beloved, but with subdued joy, for he felt that while all was brightly changed for them, at what an awful price had been purchased their present happiness.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WEDDING-DAY

SINCE the mysterious murder of tne miser, twelve months had passed away, and yet no clue had been discovered to the perpetrators of that crime. Gerald Mostyn, in default of the existence of a will, remained in the possession of his grandfather's estate. Doctor Horne continued to reside at Radnor's Ruin, to practise his profession, and "golden opinions from all sorts of people." But what was most strange, his lovely wife, from the day of the miser's dreadful death, had fallen into the profoundest state of despondency, that so affected her health as to make the constant attendant of a nurse necessary to her safety. Alice Owen, having resolved to earn her bread by any honest occupation, willingly accepted the situation as attendant upon the invalid lady, and resided at Radnor's Ruin. Gerald Mostyn had grown in favour with earth and heaven. His position as the most eminent of the rising young statesmen of the day was most universally acknowledged; his rank as one of the most important members of the landed and moneyed aristocracy of the state was fully established;

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

but "sweeter still than this, than that, than all," to him —his relation as the accepted lover, and affianced husband of Constance Wynne, was openly recognized.

Christmas approached, at which holy and happy season the marriage was appointed to be solemnized. Gerald Mostyn was at this time fulfilling the duties of his official station in London; but he was expected to arrive at Llyndell on Christmas-eve, the day fixed for the wedding. It was arranged that the bridal pair should spend one month in a wedding-tour on the Continent, and that afterwards they should return to London, where the official duties of the bridegroom would require his presence, and where apartments were to be pre-engaged at one of the best hotels. Great were the preparations at Llyndell for the marriage of the heiress of that house. Gerald Mostyn and Constance Wynne would both have willingly waived all this ostentation, but Mrs. Horton would have a grand wedding, and as the question of "display or no display," was under the circumstances a matter of little importance, they did not think proper to oppose the will of the old lady. Constance, accompanied by her grandmother, her uncle, and one of her cousins, went to town to select a proper trousseau. There Mrs. Horton was most lavish, as well of her own means as those of her grand-daughter Constance. She purchased and pressed upon her acceptance the most costly dresses, shawls, laces, and jewels, that were to be found in London. These were packed and dispatched to Llyndell. A fashionable milliner and mantua-maker, and a French cook and confectioner, were engaged to go thither, to officiate. The mission to the city thus well accomplished, Mrs. Horton and her party returned home. And the remaining week preceding the marriage was one of unprecedented bustle. In an upper room a company of dressmakers and plain seamstresses, worked under the direction of the city milliner. In the kitchen and pantry a squad of scullions toiled in the service of the French cook and confectioner. Nor were Mrs. Horton and her fair grand-daughters any less busily engaged.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Their taste and skill governed all the arrangements. Even Colonel North's services were called into requisition to write half a hundred cards of invitation, which were scattered not only among all the visiting acquaintances of the family throughout the country and the adjoining shires, but distributed to distant friends and relatives residing in London, Brighton, and Bath. As many of these guests were expected to remain over night, chambers were prepared for their accommodation. As the important day approached, the weather became very fine. Christmas-eve was a delightful winter day, clear and cold with a crisp frost; the ground was covered with snow, lightly frozen, and affording good travelling, and promising a large number of guests, even from a distance. And as early as nine o'clock in the morning carriages full of company began to arrive. At this hour the younger ladies were all invisible, being closeted with the milliners in the room adjoining the bride's chamber, engaged in putting the finishing touches to their costumes.

Mrs. Horton was in the drawing-room below stairs to receive her guests. And her woman Evans was in waiting to attend them to their several chambers. The elegantly furnished breakfast-room was not as yet thrown open. Mr. Mostyn and his friend Mr. Brent were expected to meet the bride at ten o'clock, when the marriage ceremony was to be solemnized at the parish church, and to be followed by a breakfast at Lyndell.

The two younger Misses Horton were to be the attendants of the bride; and Mr. Brent and Dr. Heath were to be those of the bridegroom. The bishop of the diocese, who was on a visit to Christ Church Parsonage, for the purpose of confirming the younger members of the church, was to perform the marriage ceremony. Colonel North was to give away the bride. At ten o'clock all was ready. The drawing-rooms, superbly furnished, and beautifully adorned, were filled to overflowing with a distinguished company. The hall was crowded with attendants; and the lawn around the house covered with coaches, gigs, and saddle-horses.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

In her chamber, the bride sat and mused. To please Mrs. Horton, Constance Wynne's dress was the most magnificent costume ever seen in that part of the country. It cost a small fortune, but that circumstance was only an additional recommendation in the eye of Mrs. Horton. It was an ample robe of rich white velvet, with a border of orange flowers wrought in seed pearls; a light wreath of the same pattern and material ran around the sleeves and neck of the corsage; a bunch of the same flowers, similarly formed, adorned the stomacher; deep falls of fine point lace half veiled the rounded arms and curved bosom; a bracelet and necklace of diamonds encircled her wrists and throat; a wreath of orange-blossoms, formed of the richest oriental pearls, and gemmed with the dew of finer diamonds, crowned her queenly brow and raven hair. The most delicate gloves and slippers completed her costume. And like a transparent mist tempering the sunshine, over all the resplendent form there floated a superb veil of Valenciennes lace. Thus magnificently arrayed, Constance Wynne sat alone, waiting and musing—her noble brow expanded and radiant, her clear gray eyes dilated and darkened, her pale cheeks flushed, her full lips glowing, her whole fine countenance eloquent with the enthusiasm of a profound and earnest joy!

"Oh! her thoughts were not engaged with the outward splendour of her own position, dazzling as it was; but with the heart-felt happiness, which, by the side of Gerald Mostyn, future years *must* bring her—aye, *must!* despite the proverbial vicissitudes of human life! It was not probable, scarcely possible, that adverse change should come to them; but if it should—why let it come! If only her husband, her *husband* were left her, her happiness was beyond the ingenuity of man, the malice of Satan, or the inconstancy of fortune to disturb! In the blessedness of being united for life to *him*, all other favours or disfavours of fortune seemed swallowed up—so that, had it been necessary, rather than have parted with Gerald Mostyn, she would have joyfully chosen to share with him the deepest obscurity,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

the severest toil, and the utmost privation, even for the whole of their natural lives;—aye! and had eternity pains and trials for the good, with him she would have shared them also. She seemed not so required to prove her love; and now, in the noonday of her prosperity, all the lesser lights were lost in the radiant sunshine of one intense joy—the joy of becoming for time and for eternity the wife of Gerald Mostyn.

So Constance Wynne, with soul overflowing with love and gratitude to God, sat and mused, until the opening of the door and the fluttering entrance of her two bridesmaids, who had put the finishing touches to their own rich toilets, and appeared in full dress of white satin, blond lace, pearl necklaces, and wreaths of half-blown white roses.

"Constance, are you ready? Are you ready, Constance?" they simultaneously inquired.

"Quite," replied the bride, in a low voice and with a soft smile.

"Well, it wants just five minutes to ten. Mr. Mostyn arrived nearly an hour ago, and was shown to his chamber, where, I suppose, he has by this time changed his travelling dress for his wedding suit," said Miss Violet.

"And, Constance, he has brought down his first groomsman, a Mr. Brent, of the Temple, one of the finest-looking men I ever beheld. You see I was peeping through the window-blinds, and saw him when he arrived with Mr. Mostyn. And as I am first bridesmaid, you may be sure I intend to set my cap for him," said Miss May.

"Dr. Heath is to be my cavalier—has he arrived, do you know, Miss Sentinel?" asked Violet.

"Why, of course he has. Everybody has arrived. It is a perfect squeeze down-stairs! Evans tells me that Colonel North has as much as he can do to keep a way clear through the halls, and a space open for the passage of the bridal train. Heaven knows how we are to manage!" replied May.

"Oh, never fear! I suppose that just now all—young and old—will go to the church."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Constance smiled softly, but did not reply.

And just then a light tap at the door announced a visitor. Violet opened it to admit Lily, who came to ask if the bride and her attendants were ready to descend.

"Ready? Yes, and 'almost waiting.'"

"Then, madam," said Lily, with a mock courtesy to her cousin, "the bridegroom and his friends are ready to attend you to church."

And Constance, with "a smile on her lip," and a *prayer* in her heart, left the maiden bower, and followed by her bridesmaids, descended the stairs. Waiting in the hall below was a group of gentlemen, consisting of Mr. Mostyn, conspicuous above them all by his commanding stature and kingly countenance: Dr. Heath, whose intellectual and melancholy face was lighted up by unusual admiration; Mr. Brent, who appeared as fine-looking a person as Miss May had described him to be; and, finally, Colonel North, who, remembering that the Londoner was a stranger, brought him forward immediately and presented him in turn to the ladies. One glance of admiration this gentleman cast upon the bride, and then, bowing profoundly, gave his arm to Miss Horton, and led her to the carriage. Dr. Heath, with a cordial salutation to the whole party, drew the gloved fingers of Miss Lily over his broad-cloth sleeve, and followed the first couple. Then Constance and Gerald met! and for a single instant spoke together. They had not seen each other for months, and now but a few syllables could be uttered in the few moments afforded while they were passing from the foot of the stairs to the door of the hall. But these few words were freighted with their hearts' deep love.

"My Constance—my adored bride!" he exclaimed, in a voice subdued but thrilling with earnestness, as he drew her hand within his arm, "my worshipped one! my queen! are you not? are you not?"

"I am your *wife*, happier in that dear name than I could be in any title, were titles for me!" she answered, in a tone deeply vibrating with a love too pure, profound, and passionate for dissembling.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"My own, own wife!"

"For life, and death, and eternity!"

They had now come up with their attendants, where the whole party separated and entered their several carriages.

CHAPTER XIV.

PAINFUL ARREST AT THE MARRIAGE FEAST.

THEY reached the church, which was filled with an expectant congregation. Amid a general murmur of admiration, the bridal *cortege* entered, passing through the passage opened for them through the crowd, and took their station, forming a semi-circle in the space before the bishop, who, book in hand, stood ready to officiate. And now, while every pair of eyes in the church were strained upon the wedding crescent, the bishop opened the book, and, amid a profound silence, by some strange fatality commenced reading—oh, direful omen!—the service for the *burial of the dead!*

But at the same instant that the solemn words fell upon the ears of the bridal pair, thrilling their bosoms with strange prophetic dread, and before the sound could reach the senses of more distant hearers, he had, with presence of mind, corrected his mistake, and while the giggling bridemaids were hiding their mirth behind their fans, he launched into the marriage ritual. The solemn adjuration was made, the prayers offered, the questions proposed, and the vows registered. Colonel North gave away the bride, and Gerald Mostyn placed upon her finger the binding ring, the symbol of eternity; then the exhortation was pronounced, the benediction given, and Gerald and Constance were declared, in the sight of earth and Heaven, man and wife! Friends crowded around to kiss the bride and shake hands with the bridegroom; so many friends, so many congratulations were there, that it was fifteen minutes before the newly-married pair were

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

permitted to enter their carriage and return to Llyndell to breakfast. Then the bridal party, Constance leaning on the arm of Mr. Brent, and Miss Horton on that of Mr. Mostyn, and Miss May on Dr. Heath's, led the way to the breakfast-room. The table, luxurious with edibles, elegant in arrangement, and dazzling with plate, had taxed the utmost skill, taste, and resources of the French confectioner and his assistants, and was quite a triumph of his art.

The company gathered around the board. Some seemed spell-bound beside it. Temples and pagodas, Christian and heathen, cornucopias and caskets, boats and bouquets in candy, in jelly, and in fruits, were demolished and consumed; ices melted away, though it was the depth of winter; roasted turkeys, ducks, fowl, and game, took to themselves wings and flew off. Champagne left long-necked bottles, to become real pain in the heads of old gentlemen; nuts and jests were cracked; wine and healths were drunk; speeches and fools were made; the feast was prolonged. Finally, the bride's health was proposed, and after the toast was duly honoured, she retired to change her bridal costume for her travelling dress.

Unperceived by the company, who were at the height of their enjoyment, Gerald Mostyn withdrew from the room to the library, where he found Mr. Osborne waiting him, and where he was soon joined by Colonel North, Doctor Maraudy, and the bishop. Very gladly would Mr. Mostyn have avoided this lusty wine-drinking and speech-making; but custom was despotic, and he was obliged to yield. The wine was poured, the glasses filled and raised, the toast—

"Health, happiness, and long life to Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Mostyn!"

Given and honoured. And then the bridegroom was permitted to bow and retire to change his dress. They had just reached the foot of the stairs, when a loud ringing of the hall-bell aroused not only them, but all within the house. A servant opened the door to see who the applicant might be. An officer was standing

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

without, who strode into the hall, "as one having authority," and inquired—

"Is Mr. Gerald Mostyn within?"

"In course he is, sir," answered David.

"Let him know that there is a person here who wishes to see him."

"Yes, sir; but, but I beg your pardon, sir, he can't be seen—he's jest been gettin' married, sir."

"My errand will admit of no delay. You must let your master know."

"But, sir, I assure you, he was jest a going to go——"

"Fellow! It is a matter of life and death. Go fetch your master immediately. I must see him."

"Well, sir; if you must, I s'pose you must; but who shall I say asks for him, sir?"

"Tell him—an officer."

"Yes, sir," said the man, hurrying off to inform his master.

But Mr. Mostyn, who had overheard this conversation, now hastened forward, and recognizing an old acquaintance in the sheriff of the county, exclaimed cheerfully, and without the least suspicion of his errand—

"Why, Harrison, how do you do?"

"I am well, I thank you, Mr. Mostyn. How are you?"

"Very well," returned Gerald, cordially. "You have business with me, my servant said."

"Yes, sir, replied the sheriff, hesitatingly, as if very reluctant to make known his errand.

"By the way, it must be very important business that has brought you here at this crisis," said Gerald Mostyn, seriously.

"Sir, it *is very* important," replied the sheriff, gravely.

"Then let us know what it is, sir!"

"Mr. Mostyn, it is not only a very important, but a very *painful* business," continued the officer, solemnly. By this time, Mr. Osborne, Colonel North, and several others, had come up.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Is the business of such a nature as to demand a private interview?" inquired Gerald.

"No, sir; but its nature is very, very painful."

"Then, in the name of reason, sir, get it over as quickly as possible," exclaimed Gerald, growing anxious.

"Mr. Mostyn, I am forced to the performance of a most obnoxious duty."

"Well, for heaven's sake, do it, man!"

"Then, Gerald Mostyn, you are my prisoner!" said the sheriff, letting his hand fall upon the shoulder of the bridegroom.

"Your prisoner!" exclaimed the latter, in amazement.

"Prisoner!" echoed all who heard the word.

"Yes, sir—yes, gentlemen; I very much regret to be the bearer of a warrant for the arrest of Mr. Gerald Mostyn."

"Warrant!"

"Arrest!"

"Gerald Mostyn!!!" simultaneously exclaimed Mr. Osborne, Colonel North, and the bishop, who had now joined the party.

"But, good heaven! upon what charge?" inquired Colonel North.

"Upon a charge that will doubtless prove unfounded, sir," replied the sheriff, politely.

"But what the demon is it, then?"

"Gerald Mostyn is arrested upon the charge of having twelve months since assassinated his aged relative, Hugh Horne."

"Murder?" questioned Colonel North, in a deep, stern voice.

"Parricide!" muttered the bishop, turning pale with horror.

"Gerald Mostyn!" exclaimed Mr. Osborne, in indignant incredulity.

As for the accused, after the first involuntary start of astonishment, he stood pale, calm, and motionless as a statue.

"It is certainly a monstrous charge from which,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

doubtless, Mr. Mostyn's innocence will come forth as gold from the furnace," said the sheriff, conciliatingly; "but in the meantime, gentlemen, you must see the necessity of my performing my duty."

"Good Heaven, this affair will become known to our guests! Osborne, good friend, pray close the doors of the drawing-rooms, while I send these lounging rascals about their business," said Colonel North, in a low and confidential tone, as he stepped quickly from the scene of action, and sent four or five loitering men-servants from the hall through the back door.

Mr. Osborne had complied with the request that had been made to him.

But it was too late! Already the rumour that the bridegroom, Gerald Mostyn, was arrested upon the charge of murder, was spreading in fearful whispers, and eliciting low, horror-fraught exclamations through the company in the saloon. Colonel North and Mr. Osborne, unconscious of this, returned to the spot where they had left Mr. Mostyn, the bishop and sheriff.

"What is to be done now?" inquired Mr. Osborne.

"Gentlemen, I regret to say that Mr. Gerald Mostyn will have to go with me."

"You cannot mean it?"

"Unfortunately yes, sir; I have a couple of bailiffs with a carriage and horses waiting without to take him away."

"But, for Heaven's sake, tell us, then, upon what ground—upon whose accusation—has this warrant been issued."

"Sir, I cannot inform you. All I know is, that about two hours since, I was summoned to the house of Mr. Judson, who put that warrant into my hands, with directions to serve it immediately. I took it, procured a carriage and horses, and the assistance of two officers, and came directly hither. And now, gentlemen, I hope that no obstacle will be thrown in the way of my performance of this duty."

"Sir, I am ready to attend you," said Gerald Mostyn, now speaking for the first time since his arrest, and with self-possession. The sheriff bowed.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"It is what I expected of you, Mr. Mostyn," he said.

"But, Mr. Harrison," said Colonel North, "cannot the investigation take place here? cannot you remain here with your prisoner until it does? We will give you a room."

"I grieve to say that I cannot, sir. The charge, you will recollect, is a capital one, which makes the custody of the accused a grave responsibility."

"But where, then, do you intend to take Mr. Mostyn for the present?" inquired the colonel, in a whisper.

"To the county jail—there is no other place," replied the sheriff.

"When will the examination take place?"

"I presume to-morrow, sir, at noon. And now, gentlemen, I trust you will excuse me. Mr. Mostyn, we must take the road."

"I am ready, sir," replied the prisoner.

The sheriff stepped to the door, and beckoned the driver of the carriage to draw up. Gerald Mostyn took his cloak from the hands of Mr. Osborne, who had gone to fetch it, and who assisted him to put it on, took his hat and gloves in his hands, and stood waiting to enter the carriage. But just then the doors of the saloon were thrown open, and the excited crowd of guests, unable any longer to bear suspense, came pouring out into the hall, where they found their worst fears realized —Gerald Mostyn actually, upon the charge of murder, in custody of the sheriff.

It was terrible to witness the scene of consternation that ensued—the amazement of the company, the distraction of the family, the hysterical cries of the young girls—and, last of all—for she was the last in the house to hear the news—the fatal grief of Mrs. Horton, who, too feeble to bear the crushing blow, sunk to the floor, and was carried, in a state of insensibility, to her chamber. In the midst of all this amazement, confusion, and distress, Gerald Mostyn, in charge of the sheriff, departed—one insupportable thought in his head—one almost irrepressible cry upon his lips—

"Oh, Constance—Constance!—oh! my three hours' bride—who shall tell you this!"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

CHAPTER XV.

BREAKING THE SAD NEWS TO THE BRIDE.

LET us return to the bereaved bride.

It will be remembered that when she withdrew from the breakfast-room, Mrs. Osborne and Mrs. Horton met her in the hall, where the old lady took the newly-married maiden to her aged bosom, prayed God to bless her in the union with the husband of her choice, pressed a kiss upon her brow, and bade her good-bye.

Mrs. Osborne then conducted Constance down the hall, to the last door on the left-hand side, where they found Lily Horton and the waiting-woman, Evans, in attendance.

Evans, with a low curtsey, opened the door, and they all entered her chamber.

It was a beautiful room, corresponding to that of Mrs. Horton, which was across the hall. All the exquisite taste and affectionate care of the girls had been lavished upon its arrangement. The walls were covered with a pearl-white paper, the floor with a carpet having a pretty pattern of roses upon a white ground, the tall windows, the elegant toilet-table, the luxurious arm-chair, the comfortable lounge, the superb tent bedstead, were all draped *en suite* with hangings of embroidered lace, lined with rose-coloured silk, and richest of those rich Marseilles quilts and table-covers were in place. The mirror was half veiled with fine lace, festooned back with clusters of red roses; upon the table before it were set in order the many delicate elegancies of the toilet—curious and costly *flacons* filled with exquisite perfumes, rare and priceless boxes made of precious metals, woods, and shells, and in the midst of all, a beautiful pin-cushion, the handiwork of Lily, made of white velvet embroidered and fringed with seed pearls. Ottoman and footstools covered *en suite* with white lace over rose-coloured chambery, and strewed about at convenient intervals. A bright coal fire in the polished steel grate, tempered by a rose-coloured transparent screen

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

that stood before it, radiated a genial warmth through the chamber. Lastly, from the centre of the ceiling, hung a chandelier of silver plate and crystal glass, that at night, under a rose-coloured shade, diffused a soft glow over the whole scene.

As the bride entered this pretty room, her attendants hastened to wait upon her; Lily drew forward the easy chair in which she seated herself; Evans placed the ottoman under her feet; Mrs. Osborne lifted the veil and the wreath from her brow; and so they proceeded to relieve her of her ornaments, Constance submitting as a matter of etiquette.

When they had put away her wedding-dress, and veil, and wreath, and jewels, and put on her a rich travelling-dress of gray cashmere, and placed her bonnet on her head, Mrs. Osborne and Lily Horton embraced and kissed her; her nurse Evans lifted her hands to her lips, and bursting into tears, prayed God that her dear young lady's married life might be as happy as her maiden life had been good; and so they all withdrew, leaving Constance to compose herself before her departure.

She remained seated in the easy chair, before the toilet-table, where they had left her to herself and her own thoughts—thoughts as pure, as sweet, and as holy as ever graced chamber or chapel—as ever filled the bosom of saint on earth or angel in heaven. For with her heart overflowing with love, and gratitude, and praise, she sat and mused, and in musing, prayed—prayed that in the great blessing of her own highly favoured lot, she might ever remember to aid, comfort, and bless, so far as she should have power, and they have need, all those whose earthly fate was less happy than her own; that amid the high distinctions which awaited her, no less from her own exalted position than from the rising celebrity of her distinguished husband, she might remain very meek and grateful—remembering "Who had made her to differ," and offering upon the altar of her heart an unceasing ovation of thanksgiving to him;—also that, above all earthly considerations, and only next to being a faithful handmaiden of the Lord, she might be a true wife to her adored hus-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

band; that the profound devotion that now inspired her heart, making her feel as if her own will were completely submerged in his, might be made her permanent disposition towards him; that, neither pride, nor temper, nor coldness, nor any other form of selfishness, might ever enter into her bosom, or alloy the love she bore him; that she might be found quite worthy of him, and equal to all his requirements—wife, friend, companion, comforter, servant, if need were—all in one.

So Constance Wynne—nay, Constance Mostyn—sat and mused while the moments glided by. The sound of the revelry—in soft murmurs, occasionally met her ear. The footsteps of passers in the hall sometimes arrested her attention.

At last the commanding step of one which she would have recognized amid ten thousand other steps, made her heart bound, her cheek flush, and her breath stop, as she listened, but without approaching her door he passed upstairs, and she breathed freely, smiled softly to herself, and sank back into her chair. A few minutes passed and then the same well-known step came lightly down the stairs. And while she held her breath and listened—smiling, blushing, waiting—the hall-door bell was loudly rung.

"A messenger for some one of the guests," was the silent interpretation of Constance.

She heard the door opened, and the sound of voices, but paid little attention, for half in hope and half in dread, she was listening to catch again the sound of those beloved footsteps that had paused in the hall. There was an increasing though still a half-suppressed excitement in the passage-way.

"Some one is departing," she thought.

She listened longer, still for that one footstep which came not back. There was an ever augmenting commotion without, the sound of many people hurrying to and fro and conversing though still in subdued tones.

"The company is breaking up," she said to herself.

But the confusion was extending. Many persons hurried down the hall. The door of Mrs. Horton's

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

chamber, immediately opposite to her own, was thrown open, and some one was borne in thither.

"A lady has fainted," concluded Constance, with an impulse to rush out to the relief of the supposed sufferer, which was only checked by the recollection that the swooning woman, whomsoever she might be, had every sort of attention she could possibly require.

All this while the guests were heard departing.

At length the excitement began gradually to subside.

At last all was silent.

Still Constance, reclining in her easy-chair, with her half-veiled eyes and soft smile, mused and listened. Why came not back that footstep?

Ah! who should tell her?

The clock struck five. Constance started at the sound.

"So late! How exceedingly strange that he should be still absent!" she thought.

Just then there came a rap at the door. It was not *his* rap—instinct told her that at once. So, with surprise, she answered—

"Come, in."

Mrs. Osborne, pallid, trembling, troubled, opened the door, and entered.

"In the name of Heaven, what is the matter?" exclaimed Constance, alarmed at her appearance.

"Oh, Constance, Constance, my dear!" cried the lady approaching and sinking into the nearest chair.

Constance arose, pale but self-possessed, saying, in a firm, calm, steady tone—

"Some misfortune has occurred; tell me at once what is its nature?"

"Oh, my dear—Gerald!"

"*Oh, my Saviour!—Gerald!* What of him?" exclaimed Constance, losing some portion of her self-control.

"Oh, my dear—my dear! how shall I ever break it to you?"

"Speak—speak! *Gerald*—you said *Gerald!*" exclaimed Constance, growing frightfully pale, and grasping the back of her chair for support.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Oh, Constance, Constance! prepare yourself! prepare yourself!"

"Heaven! WILL you tell me, or shall I have to rush out to seek for information?" exclaimed the bride, starting forward towards the door.

Mrs. Osborne sprung up and intercepted her, saying, as she forced her to resume her seat—

"Constance, sit down. I will tell you everything. Only compose yourself—be a woman."

"Then, on your life—on your soul—do not keep me an instant longer on the rack! Speak—oh speak! *Gerald!* what has happened to him?"

"Oh, my child! Gerald Mostyn has been arrested."

"ARRESTED!" echoed Constance, in even more wonder than terror, for her worst fear, that of his death, was relieved; "arrested, did you say?"

"Yes, yes."

"Arrested! good Heaven! But upon what possible pretext? He was not in debt."

"Oh, my dear! my dear! *he* was not arrested for debt."

"For what, then? Mrs. Osborne, you agonize me."

"No, no, Constance; I save you all I can."

"For what has my husband been arrested? Speak! answer me to the point, or I go to——"

"Hear it from ruder lips. Constance, listen and be strong. Your husband has been arrested for—murder?"

"*Murder!* Oh, God!" cried Constance, covering her face with both hands, and sinking back in her chair.

A pause of several dreadful moments intervened, and then, in a low, sepulchral voice, she said—

"Tell me more—tell me all. With whose—murder—has he been so falsely, so insanely charged?"

"Oh, Constance, with that of Mr. Hugh Horne—twelve months since."

"With the murder of his grandfather! Oh, heaven of heavens!" cried Constance, nearly overwhelmed with horror, and she fell back in her chair, and buried her face in her hands.

"My dear Constance, we do not know upon what

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

ground this charge has been made; but, of course, we do not believe it to be true."

"Believe it! *Perish* the soul so base as to believe such an impossibility of Gerald Mostyn!" broke forth Constance, in indignant reply.

"My dear, I hope nobody does."

"Where is he now?"

"Constance, it could not be helped. Everything was done to prevent it; but the sheriff——"

"Where is my husband? Will you tell me, or shall I go forth to seek him?"

"Constance, Constance, have patience, my dear. He was taken off to——"

"To——" "The county jail, my child."

"The county jail! Oh, saints in heaven! must that be his lodgings to-day?"

"It could not be prevented, my dear."

"Oh, madam, madam! you call yourself my friend, and yet, while I lingered here awaiting him, you suffered my husband to be carried off to prison, without coming to warn me, that I might have seen him before his departure; that I might have been permitted to go with him. Oh, Mrs. Osborne, Mrs. Osborne, was that the part of a friend?" cried Constance, bitterly.

"Yes, my dear, that *was* the part of a friend, although you may not consider it so. Constance, we did not wish you to be exposed, as, had you been informed of what was going on, your agitation must have exposed you to the gaping wonder of the crowd," replied the minister's wife, conciliatingly.

"Oh, cruel, cruel, cruel! But I, to remain here in vain lamentations, am just as cruel. Mrs. Osborne, the bell-rope is within your reach; will you do me the favour to pull it?"

"Certainly, my dear. But, Constance, what do you want?"

"My maid to order the coachman to put the horses to the carriage immediately."

"Why, Constance, my dear girl, what do you want with the carriage this time of day?" asked the lady, in astonishment.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"To follow my husband; for 'whithersoever he goes, there will I go,'" answered the bride, calmly.

"But, my dear girl, he has gone to the county prison at Gwyn."

"Then to the county prison at Gwyn I go."

"But, my dear, Gwyn is twelve miles off."

"And if it were twelve thousand, I should set forth."

"Good gracious, Constance! it is six o'clock, and quite dark."

"And if it were midnight, in the midst of a storm, I should set forth without a moment's hesitation. Evans," said she, to the woman who answered the bell, "go and order David to put the chestnut pair to my brougham, and then return here."

"Yes, madam," answered the woman, wondering at this unseasonable order, as she had wondered at other events that had taken place that evening, without daring to make a comment.

"My dear, you will not think of setting out on such an improper expedition at such an unreasonable hour?" said Mrs. Osborne, as soon as the door had closed behind Evans.

"No, madam, I shall not think of doing so, because the matter being already settled in my mind, does not require one moment's thought. I shall be with Mr. Mostyn by sunrise to-morrow, if the prison doors will open to admit an applicant at that hour," answered the bride, firmly.

"Then, Constance, since you are so resolved, there is another thing that I must inform you of. Your grandmother is very ill."

"My grandmother ill!" responded Constance, in the tone of one who, having received the heaviest blow that could possibly fall upon her, was rendered comparatively insensible to all others.

"Yes, my dear, she swooned away upon hearing of Mr. Mostyn's arrest, and was taken immediately to bed."

"Let me go and see her," said the bride, laying off her bonnet, and leaving the room.

Mrs. Osborne, hoping that the state in which she

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

should find the old lady would be an inducement sufficient to detain her at home, followed her across the hall into the chamber of Mrs. Horton.

They found the room darkened, and the patient sleeping quietly upon her bed, with Dr. Horne watching on one side, and the three girls—their festive garments changed for plain wrappers—sitting on the other.

To Constance's eager inquiries, Dr. Horne answered that the patient was out of immediate danger, and would doubtless so improve during her quiet sleep as to be much better on awakening.

Having satisfied herself in these respects, Constance withdrew from the room.

Mrs. Osborne followed her back to her own chamber, asking, anxiously—

"You will not go *now*, Constance?"

"Not *now*, but half an hour hence, dear madam."

"What, and leave your grandmother so ill?"

"My grandmother is better; she is sleeping quietly, and is likely to recover. She has yourself, Dr. Horne, and my cousins with her. Mr. Mostyn is alone in his trouble, and my place is by my husband's side," replied Constance, decisively.

And just then Evans appeared to tell her that the carriage was waiting.

Constance, with the help of her waiting-woman, hastily completed her preparations to depart.

"Good-by, Mrs. Osborne. I leave you to explain my absence to any inquirers."

"When will you come back, Constance?"

"I know not. When God wills."

"Oh, that Colonel North were here!" said the minister's wife to herself, as she saw Constance enter her carriage and drive off.

But Colonel North who was doubtless in the house or about the premises, could not, just at that juncture, be found.

And so, unmolested, Constance Mostyn pursued her journey to the village of Gwyn.

It was during this solitary night ride through the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

thick forest and the dismal mountain gorges, that the astrologer's fell prediction, now in part so strangely fulfilled, first recurred to her mind, adding its own superstitious gloom and terror to her real sorrows. But blaming herself for this credulity, and summoning her Christian faith, she mentally exclaimed—

"God reigns, and I appeal from the Egyptian's fatal prophecy to His omnipotent love and wisdom."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BRIDE AND BRIDEGROOM IN JAIL.

WE must glance back for a moment to Gerald Mostyn. Upon entering the close carriage provided to convey him to the county prison, at the recommendation of the sheriff, he seated himself upon the right-hand back cushion; Mr. Harrison took the place beside him; facing them on the front seat sat the two constables. The doors were fastened, the word given, and the carriage drove on.

The sheriff would have entered into some consoling conversation with prisoner, but that gentleman declined the discussion of his own affairs, and they relapsed into taciturnity. Respect for Mr. Mostyn restrained the officers from conversing upon irrelevant subjects, and the consequence was that for hours the drive proceeded in perfect silence.

The thoughts of Gerald were meanwhile occupied with the incomprehensible strangeness of his present position. But an hour ago, honoured as a Christian gentleman, an accomplished scholar, and a distinguished statesman, and blessed as the happy bridegroom of the loveliest lady in the land, and now a prisoner in the hands of the sheriff, upon the confounding charge of murder! It was inconceivable. In all the fabled vicissitudes of human life, he had heard of nothing like this. He felt as one under the influence of fever, from which he vainly endeavoured

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

to clear his brain, or of mania, from which he struggled to escape, or nightmare, from which he strove to awake. It actually required a strong effort of the will to gather the scattered faculties of his astonished mind, and concentrate them upon this amazing event. Upon what possible pretext could he have been charged with this most unnatural crime? He reviewed all the circumstances of his relations with his deceased grandfather, and of his last visit to Horne's Hole, without finding anything to explain, or give a clue to, or throw the least light upon, the subject of his accusation. The sheriff, as it had been seen, could tell him nothing. It remained, then, to wait patiently for the preliminary examination before the magistrate, which was to take place the ensuing day.

But the bitterest part of the reflections that followed, was the conjecture as to what would be the effect of the news of his arrest upon Constance, his adored bride, who had so fondly and so fully loved and trusted him, and upon his thousands of friends who had so esteemed and honoured him. Would *they* still give him their confidence and respect? Would *she* still yield him her love and faith?

In the midst of all this the astrologer's prediction recurred to his memory; but its partial fulfilment was regarded as a mere coincidence, and this part of the subject was dismissed by his practical good sense.

While these thoughts revolved in his mind, the carriage entered the village of Gwyn, and stopped before the prison.

The bailiffs alighted. The sheriff followed, and invited his prisoner to come out. Mr. Mostyn, aroused from his reverie, descended and stood upon the flag stones.

It was now quite dark.

They were in the midst of a quiet, silent, murky village street. No creature except themselves was stirring. No light, except through the chinks of the closed shutters, gleamed in the whole town.

Before them stood the prison, a moderate-sized square stone building, enclosed by a stone wall in a circum-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

scribed yard, in which was also the small two-storied brick house, occupied by the jailer. Here, also, all was dark and silent. The sheriff's officer rapped long and loudly at the gate before he succeeded in rousing up the jailer, who at last put his head out of an upper window, and asked—

"What the deuce is the matter? What do you want?"

"It is the sheriff with a prisoner," answered a constable.

"Oh, aye! I'll be down in a minute," and the head, or rather the voice, for the head could not be seen, in the darkness, disappeared from the window.

And in a few minutes the jailer, attended by the turnkey, came out to the gate, unfastened the strong locks, took down the heavy bars, and admitted the party. Then, after the sheriff had spoken apart to the jailer, explaining to him the name and standing of the accused, together with the crime with which he stood charged, and demanding on his behalf, a considerate and respectful treatment, he took that official up to his charge and introduced him—

"Mr. Wardour, the governor of the prison, Mr. Mostyn."

"Can't say, 'I am glad to see you, sir,' or do I suppose you are 'very happy to make my acquaintance,' few people are; hows'ever, as the quality say to their visitors, 'we'll do all that we can to make your stay with us as agreeable as possible,'" said the jailer, very gravely, even sympathetically, and without the least pretention to a jest.

Mr. Mostyn bowed without replying.

"Go on, Turner," said the warden to the turnkey, who, with a lantern, preceded the party to the main entrance of the prison.

When the heavy, iron-bound door was unlocked and thrown open, they entered a large and gloomy corridor, opened the first side-door on the right, and went into the warden's office, where a little preliminary business was transacted, after which the sheriff took leave of his charge, and with the constables left the jail.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Now, sir, if you please," said the jailer, politely, rising. "I will show you to your room."

Mr. Mostyn, with a grave inclination of the head, arose and followed him. And attended by the turnkey, with a lantern, and a bunch of great keys they passed up a flight of stone steps and reached an upper passage corresponding exactly to the one below, and flanked like that on each side, with rows of narrow cells. Turning on his course, the warden led his charge up the passage until they reached the furthest door on the right-hand side front. Turning a key, he admitted him into a small apartment, six feet by nine, having a single grated window in front, a small cot bedstead, a chair, and a stove.

"I put you in this room because it is one of the pleasantest in the establishment—that is, if any of them are pleasant, which I suppose the lodgers seldom think they are, sir," said the warden, offering the single chair to his prisoner, and conducting himself quite with the air of a landlord receiving a guest.

"Anyways," he continued, this room is clean and dry; and is in front of the building, with a southern aspect, where the sun looks in all day long, and the window looks out upon the village street."

"I thank you," said Mr. Mostyn.

"Would you like a fire, sir, or perhaps you would rather lie down at once?" inquired the warden, with the same landlord-like *empressement.*

"I shall be obliged to you for a fire, lights, writing materials, and also a small stand. I shall not lie down."

"Certainly, sir, they shall be brought immediately. Turner—do you see to the fire, and I'll attend to the other things."

The fire was soon kindled, and a little stand was brought in, upon which was placed a lighted lamp, pens, ink, and paper.

"Now, then, sir, is there anything else we can do for you?" asked the jailer, politely.

"No, I thank you, Mr. Wardour."

"Ahem! Sir!"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Mr. Mostyn looked up.

"I can feel for a gentleman in your circumstances. But, sir, if you would just consider yourself in a tavern like, and call me 'landlord,' and Tom Turner here 'waiter,' it might seem to go better like to a gentleman of your fine feelings."

Mr. Mostyn stared in surprise. Up to this time he had been too deeply absorbed in his private thoughts to notice the personal appearance of the oddity who had him in custody; but now he gazed with curiosity upon a little, short, fat man, of about fifty years of age, with a round rosy, good-natured face, kind blue eyes, and scanty light hair, curling around an open forehead —a man who, had he been really a landlord, would have been full of lively good-fellowship, but whose position as warden of the jail, and whose sympathy with the unhappy prisoners, had quite sobered down to habitual gravity. He wore a suit of brown clothes of a Quakerish simplicity. Seeing that Gerald looked at him without replying, he resumed—

"Now do, sir, for if you only would, you have no idea how much cheerfuller it would seem to be. Turner, too, would a great deal rather be called waiter, wouldn't you now, Turner?" he continued, appealing to the turnkey. "In course, sir," answered that functionary.

Gerald now glanced at the last speaker.

Turner was a complete contrast to his master, being a young man, with a tall, spare, and slightly stooping figure, a protruding head, a thin face, shaded with a quantity of rank red hair, and an expression of countenance at once keen, grave, and compassionate—a look that he had contracted by continually pitying the prisoners, and prying into their affairs.

While answering his master, he bowed with intense respect to Mr. Mostyn.

"There now, you see, Turner would like it better, too, sir," exclaimed the warden, triumphantly.

At any other time Mr. Mostyn must have smiled at the quaintness of the idea presented to him; but now his heart was too heavily oppressed, and he answered sorrowfully—

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"I really thank you, but I would rather call persons and things by their proper names."

"And I think, too, sir," put in Turner, who had been bending one of his keenest regards upon the prisoner, "that the gentleman would rayther be left to himself."

"Aye! the boy is more thoughtful than I am—always is. Well, well, have your own way, Mr. Mostyn. We are at your orders—Tom Turner and me. Don't mind my just turning the key of your door, 'it's the rules of the house,' you know. You find the rules pasted up in many a tavern." And so saying, the warden bowed himself out; then in an instant he bowed himself in again, saying—

"Excuse me, sir, but what would you like for breakfast?"

"Anything—anything, my good friend; it really does not matter."

"But if you would be good enough just to express a preference, sir."

"Well, well, a cup of coffee."

"And anything else nice that the mistress can prepare," suggested Tom Turner, in a low tone, nudging the elbow of his chief.

"Always thoughtful—always thoughtful, Turner."

"Well, sir, we will do all we possibly can for your comfort." And with a very deferential bow, the jailer retired, softly closed the door, and stealthily turned the key, lest the sound should grate upon the feelings of the prisoner.

When left alone, Gerald Mostyn sat musing for a few moments, then he drew the little stand with the lamp and the writing materials before him, and commenced a letter to his newly-made and newly-bereaved wife. He wrote on for some time, filling page after page with the outpourings of his spirit, until, warned by the dim red burning of his lamp, he looked up, and saw that day had dawned.

Christmas-day; but what a Christmas-day for him!

He arose, extinguished the light, and opened the little window to admit the fresh morning air.

Through the grating he looked out across the country

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

to the distant hills whose summits were white with snow, and flushed with salmon colour on the eastern sides from the coming sun.

Then his eyes sunk down upon the village street beneath his window, which was beginning to be astir with early pedestrians and country waggons.

Just across from the prison was the village hotel, whose upper rooms were on a level with his cell. On the right of the hotel was the village post-office, and on the left a physician's office, bearing the sign, DR. HEATH.

Gerald Mostyn gazed upon the scene, as seeing it not. His thoughts were far away.

"Constance! Constance! how breaks this day to her? How fares she now? Who will comfort her?" were the perpetually recurring questions of his mind.

While thus he sorrowfully gazed and mused, the sound of wheels arrested his attention—because they were not those of the heavy, springless, noisy farm-waggons, that so often rattled and rebounded past, but of the smoothly revolving ones of the comfortable family coach; looking down, he saw a close carriage of dark green, drawn by a pair of fine thorough-bred chestnut horses. Recognizing this equipage as belonging to Llyndell, and murmuring the name of "Colonel North," he was about to retire from the window, when the carriage drew up at the gate, and before the coachman could leave his seat, the door flew open and Constance alighted. Though this was earlier than the hour for opening, she apparently found no difficulty in gaining admittance, for in a few moments he heard steps approaching along the corridor, and in another instant his door was unlocked and Constance in his cell and in his arms.

Tom Turner, who let her in, had closed the door and retired.

For a few moments he held her clasped to his bosom in silence, while she wept upon his shoulder; and then—

"Constance! my own, own Constance! how I thank you for this!" he said, straining her to his heart.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Thank me? Oh, why? It was my blessed privilege to come to you," she exclaimed, in a voice thrilling with emotion, as she lifted her head from his shoulder, and met his look of passionate love.

"But, dear wife! sweet wife!" he murmured, softly smoothing back the dark waving tresses from her white brow, "how pale you are! You cannot have slept at all!"

"Oh! did you think I could, and you—*here?*"

"And to come to me so early this morning, you must have travelled through the darkest hours of the night."

"I did! I did! Ah! did you think I could do *otherwise?*—but that was nothing—nothing! Now I am with you, thank God!" she said, fervently, taking her handkerchief from her pocket and wiping the tears from her eyes.

"I wish I had not wept," she continued, "I intended to be calm; for after all, dear Gerald, though this affair is very trying to us, yet it must be over in a few hours. The examination before the magistrate takes place, I am told, at ten o'clock this morning. And this charge against *you* is so very unreasonable, so exceedingly preposterous—nay, indeed, if it were not for the awful nature of the crime, I should say so supremely ridiculous—that it will not bear a moment's calm investigation."

Gerald might have told her that, irrational as the accusation really was, unsupported as it might prove, and speedily discharged as probably he should be, yet the stigma of the charge must rest upon him forever, or until the real criminal should be discovered.

Hearing footsteps approaching, he strained her once more to his bosom, pressed an impassioned kiss upon her lips, and released her from his close embrace.

Then placing her in the only chair, he stood beside her, with his hand resting upon the little stand, and waiting for the new-comer.

It was Tom Turner again, who softly rapped, and being bidden come in, stealthily turned the key and deferentially entered.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

He came to bring hot and cold water and clean towels, and to announce that Mr. Mostyn's breakfast was ready.

Then he quickly disappeared again. But by the time Mr Mostyn had refreshed his face and hands, he returned, bearing a good breakfast for *two*. He set it upon the little stand, darted out of the cell, and brought a second chair. Then begging of Mr. Mostyn to rap on the table if he should need anything, the good creature withdrew, and remained outside the door.

The newly-married pair drew up to the stand and simultaneously raised their eyes to each other's face; the same thought was in the minds of both—

"How little did we think our Christmas breakfast would be served in the cell of the county prison." But as they gazed upon each other, their eyes softened and glowed with the mutual thought—

"But we sit down to partake of it *together*."

In truth, there was but little appetite between them: yet each drank some coffee and ate a small morsel of bread; and then Mr. Mostyn summoned Tom Turner to take away the service. That honest officer entered, replenished the fire, cleared the stand, and retired, leaving the pair together in the cell, where they remained conversing until ten o'clock, when the warden entered to inform the prisoner that the sheriff had arrived to attend him to the magistrate's office.

"My dearest love, where shall I dispose you?" inquired Mr. Mostyn, as he arose and waited the entrance of the sheriff.

"Dispose me? On your arm; by your side; I cannot leave you, Gerald," replied Constance, rising, and putting her hand in his.

"My own dearest Constance, how I thank you; but this must not be, love! A magistrate's office is no place for a delicate woman.

"And this is no time, God knoweth, for fantastic delicacy!" exclaimed Constance, hurriedly; then, in a slower tone and with deeper feeling, she added—"A wife's place is beside her husband in his trouble, wherever he may be! I would remain with you

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

through all, until you are well over this trial. Dearest Gerald, do not send me from you!"

"But, sweet wife, you really must not accompany me to such a place."

She opened her lips to speak again, and then paused, and looked silently and tenderly in his face a moment, before saying—

"Ah! do not tell me so! Remember, I am bound to obey you now—a sweet, sweet bondage, that I love to feel, to which I delight to yield; only do not command me now away from your side, for if you do, I shall be obliged to go and that would deeply, deeply pain my heart!"

"It is for your own sake, dearest Constance, that I would have you leave me now."

"Then, for my own sake, let me go with you!" pleaded Constance.

"But, dear love, you do not know what you ask! The curious crowd that gathers around such a place, on such an occasion, would stare you out of countenance."

"I will lower my veil. They shall not see your wife's face—Gerald, you will let me go?" she prayed, leaning on his arm, looking up into his face—"dear husband, it is the first favour I have asked of you since our marriage. You cannot refuse it!"

No, he could not; her soft, appealing gaze, her pleading tones, her argument, were irresistible.

"Be it so, my generous love—be it so," he said, drawing her to his bosom, in an earnest embrace.

Two minutes afterwards the sheriff appeared. He bowed politely to Mr. Mostyn and his wife, and inquired if the former was ready.

Being answered in the affirmative, he led the way from the cell, down the long corridor and the stone stairs, through the lower hall, and so out of the prison and the front yard into the street, that they crossed to get into the magistrate's office, which occupied one of the lower rooms in the hotel opposite, and before which a large crowd was collected.

They made their way more easily than might have

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

been expected through the mass, which separated, leaving a path, that they might have a better view of the accused, and of the lady that hung upon his arm.

Was she, too, implicated? they asked each other.

Mr. Mostyn's eyes roved calmly over the crowd on either side, and many were the impudent glances that fell beneath his clear gaze. Constance gathered her veil closely over her face.

And so the party entered the magistrate's office. The constable stationed near the door had cleared the room of all except those persons in some manner connected with the business before the justice.

Among the persons present were the witnesses who had been examined at the coroner's inquest. Besides these were Mr. Osborne and Colonel North, who met and shook hands with the accused, and who also looked very much surprised on beholding his bride by his side.

"I trust that this *mistake* of your arrest will be soon rectified, sir," said the colonel to Mr. Mostyn.

"I trust so, sir. And I must thank you for your presence here upon this occasion," replied Gerald.

"Sir, I shall stand by a gentleman who has so recently become connected with our family, until I see better cause than now appears for abandoning him," replied the colonel, with grave dignity.

Mr. Mostyn bowed with stately courtesy.

"But, sir," continued the colonel, "I confess I am a little surprised and pained at seeing my niece here. This is certainly no place for a lady. Permit me to advise that she may retire. I can attend her from this to a private parlour in the hotel."

"Mrs. Mostyn, sir, will do her own pleasure in the matter," replied Gerald.

"Constance, my dear, take my arm; let me lead you from this," said Colonel North, going to the side of his niece.

"Uncle, I am here by my own will, and with my husband's consent. I thank you for your kind offer, but I prefer to remain," replied the lady gently, but firmly.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Headstrong woman!" ejaculated the colonel, under his breath. And before another word could be said, the justice, who had all this time been busily writing, laid aside his pen, raised his eyes, and signified his intention to open the examination.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PRISONER BEFORE THE MAGISTRATE.

A SEAT was given the accused immediately in front of the magistrate's table.

And amid a profound and almost breathless attention, the investigation commenced.

First the witnesses who had given testimony before the coroner's inquest were examined. Their evidence on the former occasion being already known to the reader, need not be repeated here in detail.

It amounted to nearly this; that the old man had given a Christmas dinner and supper; that he had retired to bed, at nine o'clock, in his usual precarious state of health; that the last persons who saw him living were Gerald Mostyn, who left his bedside and the house at ten o'clock, and Alice Owen, who, a few minutes later, visited his chamber, sung him to sleep, and left him in deep repose; that, about two hours after midnight, the overseer and the farm servants were aroused from their sleep by the shrieks of Alice Owen, from whose frantic exclamations rather than from any connected account, they learned that something horrible had occurred at the house, which, when they reached, they found to be the assassination of their master; that in the confusion Alice Owen disappeared, nor could be found to give testimony; that, when at last discovered, she was in a state of high fever, rapidly progressing to delirium, which held her life and reason in abeyance for many weeks; but that, in the opinion of these witnesses, Alice Owen, if summoned, could make some startling disclosures.

Here the magistrate directed his clerk to fill up a

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

subpœna, and place it in the hands of an officer to be served upon Alice Owen.

And a question immediately arose as to where the young person could be found.

A voice answered that she was an inmate of the family of Dr. Horne.

Then Dr. Horne arose, and said that the young lady had left his house the preceding day in a very mysterious manner, and had not since been heard from.

The magistrate, upon hearing this, directed the officer to take the subpœna, and institute a search, deciding in the meantime, that the examination should proceed. Up to this time, no testimony in the slightest degree reflecting upon the prisoner, or justifying his arrest, had been elicited. And people had begun to shrug their shoulders, when—

"Let John Hounsloe take the stand," said the clerk.

In answer to this summons, a little, wiry, dark-skinned man, clad in a shooting jacket, and known throughout the country as an old sportsman, came forward.

Everyone crowded a little nearer to hear what this new witness, who had not appeared at the coroner's inquest, and who seemed, to all intents and purposes, entirely disconnected with the circumstances of the murder, could possibly have to say about it.

The oath having been administered in the usual form, the clerk said—

"Be so good, Hounsloe, as to state to the justice all that you know in regard to the case in hand."

The witness scratched his ear, looked disturbed, and seemed very unwilling to give evidence.

But having been again requested to proceed, he said—

"I don't know nothing whatsomedever about it, more'n what I told his worship when I fotched in the clothes."

"Very well, state that."

Gerald Mostyn fixed his eyes upon the witness in surprise, curiosity, and vague expectation. Everyone else pressed closer, and listened eagerly to hear more.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

The witness looked around upon the group crowding behind him, cleared his throat, fixed his eyes upon the magistrate, and commenced.

"You see, yer worship, I were out yesterday 'long o' my dogs a-shooting in the piece o' woods in Horne's Hole, just 'atween the point were the two mount'ins join. I'd been out 'most all the best part o' the day, and got perty well lo'den down with game, so, as it got towards the arternoon, I began to think 'bout home, which lay on tother side o' the mount'in and it to cross. So I was jest a gwine to whistle the dogs to heel, when I saw 'em jest 'bout a couple o' hundred yards afore me, right at the foot o' the ridge, p'nting something as was in a crevice o' the rocks, or the side o' the ridge, I couldn't tell which. But thinking as it was a hanimal o' some sort, I jest cocked my gun, and creeped along till I got near enough—when I sez—

"'What's it, dogs—good dogs?' sez I.

"But they only whined, and guv out sharp, suddint barks, and pawed away like among the dried furze and cedar bushes and broken rocks that crowded all foot of the range, and choked up the hole where they had p'nted.

"Thinks I, it's a somethink. So I drew the charge out'n my gun, and put in a heavier load, and watched and waited, keeping my eyes fixed upon the hole, and my gun and my ears both cocked. But I couldn't hear *nor* see no livin' creature 'cept 'twas the dogs, as still continered to bark and scrape away like thunder. And presently down come a piece o' broken rock, and then another. Then the foremost dog the setter as I bought from Dr. Horne—pushed himself about half way in the hole, and began to drag at something from within.

"'It's no hanimal, nor nothink else alive,' sez I and I creeped nigh, when the dog, with a great shake of his head and a strong pull, dragged out a stout bundle, half undid in pulling it through. So I took the thing from the dog and unrolled it, and seen how it was a good suit o' cloth clothes, jest as dry and nice as if it were jest put away there. Well, I was just debatin' in my

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

mind whether I should take it home, or whether I hadn't better put it back, in case the real owner had put it there for safe keeping, when I noticed the velvet cuff of the right sleeve all splotched with thick, gummy stains, like dark red wax. The right breast o' the coat, and the right leg o' the pants, jest above the knee, was splotched with the same stuff, jest as if it had been spurted on 'em. It kinder made my heart stand still, though I wa'n't quite sure what it was.

"In a sorter awe, I begun to s'arch the pockets, and out'n the inside breast pocket I drawed a packet, as when I unrolled, it didn't take any better scholar nor myself to see, was old dockerments o' some sort, which, not being college bred, I couldn't make head nor tail on. S'arching the other pockets, I found a razor, rusted and stuck together, and a white pocket han'kerchef, gummed together with the same dark stuff, and havin' of a name on it as I couldn't make out, and last of all, a little book with ivory leaves and tortoise-shell covers, writ all over with so'thing as much Greek and Latin to *me* as the pocket han'kercher and the dockerment was.

"Then all ov a suddint, while lookin' at the things—'specially at the stained clothes, the razor, and the document—I memorized the murder of Mr. Hugh Horne, and the talk o' the missing will, and thinking this had something to do with that, I rolled up the things together ag'in and called the dogs, and sot off fast as I could go through the woods and 'cross the country to this place, where I tuk the things right up to constable McNab, who examined them, and—constable McNab will tell you the rest," concluded the witness.

Nothing could exceed the keenness of the interest with which this testimony was received.

Gerald Mostyn listened with the closest attention, and when the discovery of the clothing was described, an acute observer might have detected in his firmly set face a slight change of colour.

Constance, who had been accommodated with a seat to the left of, and a little behind her husband, listened with

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

her face pale with anxiety, and her lips compressed with resolution.

Colonel North, who stood on the left of his niece, with folded arms and frowning brow, heard without a comment.

But Mr. Osborne, who stood on the right of Constance, and immediately behind the accused, stooped and whispered—

"That is all very interesting and important, doubtless. But for all it has to do with the guilt or innocence of our friend here, it might as well be an investigation into the origin of the Chinese religion."

Before anyone could answer, the magistrate spoke, addressing the witness—

"You may sit down, Hounsloe, unless the accused wishes to cross-examine you," he added, turning towards Mr. Mostyn, who was his own counsel.

That gentleman bowed with grave courtesy, saying—

"For the present, no, sir."

"He is right," whispered Mr. Osborne to the colonel. "'Masterly inactivity' is a mighty power in some cases. This may be a conspiracy, in which he is wise to give them (so to speak) rope enough to hang themselves."

"Or *himself*," muttered the colonel between his teeth.

"Let Alexander McNab take the stand," said the clerk.

In response to the summons, a tall, raw-boned, red-headed man, of Caledonian origin, advanced. Being duly sworn, he said—

"Your worship, at seven o'clock last evening, the last witness came to my house, bringing the bundle of clothes which he has just described, and of the finding of which he gave the same account to me that he did to your worship. We then examined the clothes and the articles found in the pockets. The clothes we were unable to identify, but the name on the handkerchief, gentlemen, was that of 'G. R. Mostyn.'"

"My God!" exclaimed Constance, in a deep, low voice, clasping her hands, and growing deadly pale.

The accused heard this startling evidence with calmness. Indeed, only once had he betrayed any emotion,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

and that was, as I said, on hearing of the discovery of the clothing.

The frown darkened upon the countenance of Colonel North.

But Mr. Osborne stooped and whispered him—

"Tut! that proves nothing; the handkerchief was most likely picked up by the real murderer, and thrust into his pocket."

The witness proceeded.

"We next examined the razor, on the handle of which was engraved the single name, 'Mostyn.' Then we looked at the tablets, on the cover of which was a small silver shield, adorned with a wreath of laurel, encircling the inscription—'Constance to Gerald.' Lastly we unfolded the document, which proved to be the will of Mr. Horne, executed in favour of his nephew, Dr. Horne, to whom he bequeathed his whole estate. Rolling the packet up, we took it to your worship, who thereupon issued a warrant for the arrest of Mr. Gerald Mostyn. That is all I have to state, except that the articles are here, subject to the order of your worship."

Gerald Mostyn heard these dreadful disclosures with an unmoved countenance. And Constance, noble Constance, after the first exclamation of anguish had escaped her lips, placed her hand within her husband's, and sat calm, still, and firm, though pale as parian marble.

But it is impossible to describe the consternation with which this terrible testimony was heard by the majority of persons present. They stared in each other's faces in blank dismay, or astonished inquiry, as if to ask—"Are we awake? Do we dream? Is this real?"

The countenance of Colonel North grew dark as doom. He bit his nether lip until the blood started.

Only Mr. Osborne stooped and said—

"Circumstantial evidence! The merest circumstantial evidence. I am no lawyer, but it is easy for me to see through this. Of course, the murderer was also a robber, and purloined those effects of Mr. Mostyn found in the pocket of the hidden clothing."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

At this suggestion the darkened countenance of Colonel North slightly cleared. But the examination was proceeding, and their attention was immediately given to that.

"Let the articles in question be produced," said the magistrate.

The constable retired a few steps, took a bundle from a bailiff at hand, and laid it upon the table, where, unrolling it, he displayed the blood-stained clothing and the other items described by the two preceding witnesses, who, being recalled, identified them.

"Let Dr. Horne take the stand," said the magistrate.

Dr. Horne came forward, pale, trembling, tottering, and altogether more agitated than any other person present had yet appeared.

"Dr. Horne, have you seen this suit of clothing before?"

"Yes, your worship," replied the witness, in faltering tones.

"Tell us, if you please, in whose possession, and upon what occasion you have seen it."

"I have seen that suit, sir, but once—it was then worn by Mr. Gerald Mostyn at the Christmas dinner given by Mr. Hugh Horne upon the day of his death."

Awful was the effect of these words upon all present. The panic deepened. Colonel North turned away. Even Mr. Osborne made no comment. Only Mr. Mostyn remained composed, and Constance, dear Constance, pressed his hand.

"You are sure—remembering that you are upon your oath—that this was the identical suit of clothing worn by Mr. Mostyn upon the occasion you have stated?"

"I am sure of it, sir."

"I would ask the witness one question," said Mr. Mostyn, now for the first time rising.

"Proceed, sir," said the magistrate.

Gerald Mostyn turned towards the witness, and, endeavouring to catch his eye, inquired—

"Dr. Horne, will you state whether that occasion to which you referred was the *last* upon which you saw this suit of clothes?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Yes," replied the witness, in a voice that grew steadier from effort, "that was the first, the last, and the only occasion upon which I ever saw these garments until I beheld them unrolled upon this table."

"Is there any other question you would ask the witness?" inquired the magistrate.

"No, sir. I have done with him for the present."

"Then you may retire, Dr. Horne."

The witness retreated.

There was a pause of a few minutes at the end of which, the justice, turning to the prisoner, said—

"Mr. Mostyn, you have heard the testimony against you, what have you to say in defence?"

Gerald Mostyn stooped and whispered to his wife—

"Courage, dear love."

Then pressing her hand, which had all this while remained in his own, he relinquished it, and rising, in a self-collected manner addressed the magistrate—

"May it please your worship, my arrest last evening upon the charge of the crime with which I stand accused, filled my mind with the most unqualified astonishment. The whole course of my past life would seem to be a sufficient refutation of such a charge, were not the accusation supported by some strangely pertinent testimony—testimony which I shall proceed to rebut by offering a few facts which may serve to throw some light upon the circumstantial evidence; and from which also I shall draw, and submit to your worship, some strong inferences."

Here the prisoner paused for a moment, to arrange his thoughts, while the crowd pressed closely around, gazing upon his face, hanging upon his words. Colonel North walked back to his post near his niece; Mr. Osborne aroused himself from his depression, and both looked and listened with the deepest interest.

"To do this," continued Mr. Mostyn, "I shall be forced to give you, sir, a succinct account of the manner in which my time was passed from the moment I bade adieu to my relative, Mr. Horne, to that when I received the intelligence of his death. Upon the night in question, at ten o'clock, I took leave of Mr. Horne, and went

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

into the adjoining chamber, which had been appropriated to my use, and *where I changed my evening dress for a travelling suit.* In my haste, for it was late, I transferred nothing except my purse and penknife from the pockets of the former to those of the latter. Having promised to return to Horne's Hole in a very few days, and not wishing to burthen myself with a heavy portmanteau, *I hung the suit, in the pockets of which I had inadvertently left a set of tablets, a handkerchief,* and perhaps some other trifles, *in the chamber, where I left it for my use, upon the occasion of my next visit.* Then throwing an ample travelling cloak around me, and taking my hat and gloves, I passed through the parlour, where I took leave of Alice Owen, and departing from the house, mounted my horse that awaited me, and rode as rapidly as the mountain path would permit, on towards Bleakton."

Here, for the second time, the accused paused; an earnest thoughtfulness shadowed his brow, as his eyes lowered for a moment upon the form of the noble girl beside him; and then, lifting his head, he continued—

"I confess that, during my ride, as well as during the whole afternoon and evening preceding it, my mind had been much pre-occupied. Hence it followed that when I had ridden about three hours, I discovered to my dismay that I had left a very important document behind lying upon the mantel-shelf of my chamber. As its recovery was absolutely necessary, I turned my horse's head, and was riding back when met by the messenger with the intelligence of the murder of Mr. Horne. It may be easily imagined that the sudden news of this awful event shocked all other ideas from my mind. Putting spurs to my horse, regardless of the dangers of the descent, I dashed down the declivity, and soon reached Horne's Hole, where the bloody corpse of the murdered man met my horror-stricken sight, and confirmed the messenger's story, and where the coroner's inquest soon afterwards met."

Here, for the third time, the prisoner paused for a moment, during which exclamations of—"An ingenious explanation," "Not a satisfactory refutation." "A likely

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

story, indeed," "Wants proof," and so forth, were passed *sotto voce* among the crowd.

"Among the exciting scenes that followed," continued Mr. Mostyn, "it will be readily believed that I had no time for thoughts of other matters. It was late in the afternoon before I remembered the important document in search of which I had turned back, and which I found just where I had left it. It was days afterwards I discovered the loss of the dress-suit which I had left in my chamber, and for which, indeed, having put on mourning, I had no use. When I missed this suit, I naturally supposed that it had been mislaid: but seeing that it could not be found, I came to the conclusion that it had been purloined by one of the servants, or perhaps by some one among the miscellaneous crowd that had filled the house at the time of the coroner's inquest, and afterwards during the funeral. And so being deeply occupied with more important affairs, I dismissed that matter from my mind. Now, however, recently-discovered circumstances constrain me to draw another deduction from the theft of the clothing, and to conclude that suit was stolen, and put on by the murderer, both for the sake of concealing his own identity, and for the purpose of fixing the crime upon another. As for the presence of the missing will in the pocket of the coat, I cannot in any manner account for that circumstance, except upon the hypothesis that that also was purloined by the murderer. Your worship, I have said all that, at present, I have to say upon this subject," concluded the prisoner, as, with a bow, he resumed his seat.

There was a pause, a hesitation, a reluctance, evident on the part of the magistrate, who at length said—

"Mr. Mostyn, your defence is very plausible; but your explanation wants proof, in lack of which it becomes my painful duty to commit you for trial before the assizes, now in session at this place."

Then turning to his clerk the magistrate gave some directions in a low voice to that functionary, who took up his pen, and began filling out a blank form.

"Fear nothing, dear one, fear nothing; for God is with the guiltless," whispered Gerald Mostyn, pressing

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

the hand of his bride, who, pale as monumental marble, had heard this judgment pronounced.

Colonel North and Mr. Osborne, after talking apart a few minutes, went up to the magistrate, and offered to enter into a recognisance to any amount that should be required for the appearance of the prisoner at court. But the justice reminded those gentlemen that a prisoner accused of a capital crime, the charge supported by strong evidence, was not bailable.

Colonel North and Mr. Osborne, after a little fruitless controversy upon the subject, bowed and fell back a few paces.

The clerk laid the committal before the magistrate, who signed and placed it in the hands of the officer, saying—

"Remove the prisoner."

Then the sitting was adjourned, and the justice arose.

The crowd began to disperse.

Colonel North and Mr. Osborne, though, as a matter of form, or perhaps from a sense of propriety, they had offered bail for the prisoner, now that it was refused, seemed indisposed to approach, or in any manner notice, Gerald Mostyn, to whom no one in that crowd, except Constance, spoke one word of sympathy, comfort, or encouragement.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FAITHFUL BRIDE.

"THIS way, if you please, sir," said the sheriff, in a cold voice, addressing his prisoner, and preparing to leave the magistrate's office.

Mr. Mostyn pressed the hand of his wife, and still retaining it in his own, arose and looked around for some proper friend to whose care he might confide her. He naturally first thought of Colonel North; but that gentleman, with a gloomy and abstracted air, was talking to the magistrate. He next looked towards Mr.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Osborne; but the minister, with a moody and repellent brow, turned away. Dr. Heath was cold and distant in manner, Dr. Horne freezing in his looks.

There was not a man in that assembly who did not believe the prisoner guilty.

Gerald Mostyn, with a keen pang, saw this, and turned his glance down upon the noble girl beside him, whom he had so unconsciously involved in his own misfortunes. She divined his thoughts and feelings, and although so deadly pale, she arose and passed her arm within his, and with a steady voice, said—

"Permit me to go with you, dearest Gerald, and to remain as long as the authorities will allow."

But before Mr. Mostyn could reply, Colonel North left the side of the magistrate, hastened forward, and seized the hand of Constance, saying—

"My dear niece, you must come with me at once. I wish to have some conversation with you."

"With Mr. Mostyn's consent, if you please, uncle," said the lady, withdrawing her hand, and lifting to her husband's face a glance full of devotion, which, perhaps, under happier circumstances, she might not have thought it necessary to display.

"Be it so, then," replied the colonel, ironically. "Mr. Mostyn, with your permission, I would have a few moments private conversation with my niece."

"Certainly, sir," replied Gerald, with dignity. Then stooping to his wife, he said, gently: "Constance, dear one, go with him. You will know where to find me an hour hence." And placing her hand in that of the colonel, Mr. Mostyn turned to follow the sheriff.

Colonel North led Constance through the back door of the office, (which, it will be remembered, was one of the first-floor front rooms of the village hotel,) and along a narrow passage to a private parlour. Placing a chair for her accommodation, he seated himself, and looking her straight in the face, said—

"Constance Wynne——"

"Constance Mostyn, if you please, uncle," amended the lady, with much dignity.

"Very well; we will not stop to dispute about trifles.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Constance Mostyn, then, I am a straightforward man, of few words. As your uncle and guardian, it behoves me to inform you that you are a fool."

"I thank you, uncle, for the intelligence. Self-knowledge is the most desirable of all wisdom."

"You need not be sarcastic, Constance; I speak only for your good. Your present circumstances are certainly distressing, but not desperate, although you are disposed to make them so."

"What mean you, uncle?"

"Why this: your case lies in a nut-shell. A marriage ceremony was yesterday performed between yourself and a man totally unworthy of you——"

"Uncle!" interrupted the lady.

"Nay, never think to transfix me with your flashing glance, Constance. I am your guardian: hear me out. Within a few hours after the ceremony this man was arrested upon the charge of murder, and, most providentially, before he had crossed the threshold of your apartments."

"And what would you seem to imply by that, sir?" inquired the resolute girl, in a firm voice, though she crimsoned to the very edges of her hair.

"A most important fact, namely, that you are a bride, but certainly not a wife."

"In this case a distinction without a difference, sir. I hold myself as irrevocably his wife as if we had been married twenty years, instead of twenty hours. But let me hear your whole policy, sir, that I may understand what you would have me to do," said Constance, whose manner had grown colder and more freezing as she began to perceive the drift of her guardian's discourse.

"I will tell you, then, Constance. Being the bride of a morning only, if you conduct yourself with delicacy, discretion, and firmness, you may be easily released from your present distressing position."

"Speak plainly, sir. In short, what would you have me do?"

"I would have you put yourself under my protection; return home with me; renounce the name of Gerald Mostyn; disclaim your union with him; resolutely

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

refuse to see him, or to hold any sort of communication with him."

Constance suddenly raised her eyes to heaven, and lifting her hands, struck them together in a fervent clasp, and dropped them upon her lap.

What rising passion provoked this gesture her companion could not know, for instantly she recovered her composure, controlled herself, and inquired as coldly and calmly as before— "Well, sir, and what then?"

"What *then?* Why, my dear, this community, who feel convinced of Mostyn's guilt, will honour you and applaud your course; your friends will give you their sympathy and respect; the court will, upon your application, annul your marriage ceremony; I myself will immediately make arrangements to take you to the Continent, where we will travel together, far from the possibility of hearing of the trial and the fate of this wretched man, and where we can remain, seeing all the wonders of the world for a year or so, until this affair is forgotten."

It would be impossible to give any idea of the expression of Constance's noble countenance while listening to this policy. The composure that she had enforced upon herself was overwhelmed by the rush of indignation, grief, and devotion, that sent the blood to her cheeks and the fire to her eyes.

"Angels in heaven!" she exclaimed, in a deep, impassioned voice—"do you hear this old man! this old man, who would have me desert my husband in the hour of his utmost need!"

"Now, then, what mean you by that, girl?" snapped the colonel, impatiently.

"Uncle!" she slowly replied, as her beautiful lip curled with the noble scorn with which a lofty spirit looks upon any kind of meanness, "I am no more capable of the contemptible course to which you counsel me than he was of committing the crime with which he stands accused!"

"In the demon's name, young woman, what is it that you say?" exclaimed the colonel, in rising anger.

"I say, in effect, sir, that I will stand by my husband

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

as long as we both shall live!" answered the lady, with unflinching courage.

"You—you will) you will?" exclaimed the colonel, in a voice quivering with rage—"You will? Then let me tell you what will be the consequence: You will be hated, despised, and rejected by the world that now shudders with horror at his unnatural crime; you will be abandoned by your friends; you will be disowned by your family; in short, you will have to share the misery, disgrace, and ruin of him whom you madly call your husband!"

"Even so much, if necessary, I promised at the sacred marriage altar! Oh, sir," said Constance, with a deep, earnest, fervent manner, to which a slight vein of sarcasm gave piercing point, "I have yet to be taught by you, that when you gave me to be the wife of Gerald Mostyn, the vow that I made then was, 'to take him for my wedded husband, for better, but not for worse; for richer, not for poorer; in health, not in sickness; through good report, not through ill report—so long as convenient, and not so long as we both shall live!'"

"Girl, what the fiend do you mean by this?"

"Sir, I mean that when I stood beside Gerald Mostyn, before the minister of God, with my heart overflowing with gratitude to heaven and devotion to him, I pledged myself to my husband, not only for as long as he should continue wealthy and distinguished, prosperous and happy—ascending from eminence to eminence, the envy of many, the admiration of all—but for whatever of good or evil fortune should be before us: for joy or sorrow, affluence or penury, glory or shame, life or death, FOR EVER AND FOR EVER!" said Constance, in a deep, earnest, enthusiastic tone.

"Ugh! ugh! ugh!" grunted the old man, starting from his chair, and walking up and down the floor.

"And now uncle," said Constance, rising, "if you have no more to say to me, I must bid you good morning, for my husband awaits me."

"Miss Constance Wynne!" cried the colonel, stopping abruptly in his trot.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Pardon me for correcting you again, sir; but since you treat me with ceremony—Mrs. Gerald Mostyn," said Constance, more jealous for her husband's name now, that the cloud rested upon it, than she could have been under brighter auspices.

"Mrs. Gerald Mostyn, then, as your guardian, I command you to remain where you are."

"Pardon me once more, sir, for reminding you that Mrs. Gerald Mostyn receives commands only from her *husband*," said the lady, sweetly, and dwelling with a luscious emphasis upon that "one loved" word.

"Death of all the demons, girl! you need a straight-waistcoat and a shower bath. Sit down here! Sit down, I say, at least, and listen to me, before you devote yourself to destruction!" exclaimed the old man, seizing his niece by the wrist, and forcing her into a seat.

"Now, then. You say, in spite of threatened misery, disgrace, and ruin, you will stand by the man whom you insanely call your husband?"

"So help me heaven at my utmost need, I WILL," said Constance, solemnly.

"How, in the meantime, are you to live? His fortune is gone. The missing will is found. He is a beggar."

"My fortune remains," answered the lady.

"It does. But, by the powers! it remains in my hands, where it shall continue for awhile."

"Then, when he is acquitted, as he will be, we can both work." "Aye; but while he is in prison?"

"I can work for him," replied the noble girl.

"*You* work for him! What can you do, Donna Quixote?—you who never helped yourself to a glass of water, or stooped to pick up your own pocket handkerchief—what can *you* do?"

"Make shirts, hem handkerchiefs, do anything honest."

"Make shirts? As if people would employ the wife of a felon!"

"UNCLE!" interrupted Constance, with startling energy.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Nay, never flash your eyes at me in that manner. I say that he is a felon!" exclaimed the old man, furiously.

"Sir," said Constance, now speaking slowly, calmly, and sternly, though she was white as alabaster, "retract that word, or by all my hopes of heaven, we are strangers henceforth!"

"I will *not* retract it! I will *repeat* it—Gerald Mostyn is a felon! I will *reiterate* it—Gerald Mostyn is a felon!" exclaimed the enraged old man, in a voice of thunder.

"Now, palsied be the tongue that speaks such slanders against his noble name!" were the words that arose to Constance's lips; but, to her credit be it said, they remained unuttered. Even amid the tempest of grief, scorn, and anger, that stormed in her bosom, she remembered the respect due to gray hairs, and controlled herself. Silently she arose and advanced towards the door, with the purpose of leaving the room.

"Return to your seat, madam! By the heaven above us, you shall not ruin yourself and disgrace your family!" thundered the old man, starting up to prevent her progress.

Constance, who was now thoroughly self-possessed, paused at once, but remained standing, while she said, quietly—

"Colonel North, listen to me, if you please. Yesterday, in the presence of numerous witnesses, you gave me as a wife to Mr. Gerald Mostyn, to whom I was then and there wedded. By that act, sir, you transferred to him all authority over me. You have now not the least right to hinder me. I go to my husband;" and with a slight bow, she went on.

He sprang up and intercepted her, seized her wrist, and forced her back to her seat. She was too proud to struggle; but just as soon as she sat down, she quickly possessed herself of the bell-tassel that hung within her reach, and holding it in her hand, said, calmly—

"Colonel North, you have committed a breach of the peace in using violence towards a woman not subject to

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

your authority. If, therefore, you again venture to use force in preventing me from leaving this room, and going to comfort my husband, you will constrain me to the very painful necessity of calling in assistance and giving you in charge."

"All the demons in and out of Hades!" exclaimed the old man, in a fainting voice, as he dropped into a chair, overwhelmed with astonishment at the audacity of Constance.

And before he recovered his self-possession, the lady quietly arose and withdrew from the room.

Constance veiled herself, crossed the street, entered the prison, and in a few moments was admitted to her husband's cell.

Mr. Mostyn was sitting in his little green wooden chair, beside the tiny black walnut stand, engaged in writing. He looked up, turned, and held out his arms as she advanced and gently dropped upon his bosom, exclaiming in low, deep impassioned, tones—"Thine, thine, thine, thine! Oh! fold me fondly, for I am thine own, own, own! I will never leave you, nor forsake you —never, never, never! Oh, I do love you, and honour you, and trust you, more than ever woman did man before!"

Closely he pressed her to his bosom, earnestly he answered—"My Constance, my beloved bride! what return can I make you for all your devotion? Oh! since this arrest *had* to be made, would to God it had been made a day earlier, that so it had not involved you in my ruin!"

"So would not I! God be thanked that since this arrest was destined to be made, it was not made one hour earlier, for thus, at least, it leaves me the privilege, the blessed privilege, the indisputable *wife's* privilege, of remaining at your side to *share*, if not to *soothe*, your sorrows! Oh! my dear, dear husband! amid all the bitterness of this bitter hour, how I thank God for this one sweet mercy!" she exclaimed, dropping her head on his breast.

"But, Constance, my devoted wife! pause before you decide. Your only earthly safety may be in leaving

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

me — pause and reflect!" he said, with earnest solemnity.

"Pause! as if I *could* pause! Oh, 'entreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee. The Lord so do to me also if aught but death part thee and me!" she replied in the solemn and beautiful words of the Moabitess.

And so through that sad Christmas-day, that sorrowful first day of their wedded lives, she remained beside him.

Towards evening, Mr. Wardour was summoned and requested to go across the street to the hotel, and try to engage a chamber and a private parlour for her accommodation.

He went. But the assizes being in session, and the village full of people, the hotel was crowded to excess, and neither parlour nor chamber could be obtained. Besides this, there was not a lodging-house in town. Nor was Constance acquainted with any family in the place with whom she might have taken up a temporary abode. Around great sorrows how many small vexations gather. Gerald and Constance looked at each other in perplexity. The good-hearted jailer came to their aid with a suggestion.

"Mrs. Wardour has a neat spare bed-room, which is very heartily at the lady's service, if she will do us the honour to take it," he said.

With earnest thanks they accepted the offer, and terms were arranged to the satisfaction of both parties. And thus by having lodging within the prison enclosure, Constance enjoyed the extraordinary privilege of remaining in her husband's cell up to the latest hour of retirement. Then, having united in evening prayer, the newly-married and most sorrowful pair separated for the night.

Constance, conducted by the turnkey, who waited for her without, went down, and left the prison for the little two-storied house in the same enclosure, that was the jailer's dwelling.

Here she was met by Mrs. Wardour, a little, fat, good-natured woman, of forty years of age, who

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

received her with the most respectful kindness, and conducted her up the little narrow stairs to a small bed-chamber, having a single window, curtained with white muslin; a list carpet on the floor; a single bed, covered with white dimity; a toilet-table, draped with white cambric; and lastly, a cheerful little wood-fire burning on a bright red hearth, before which was drawn up an easy-chair and a reading-stand. A fresh night-dress was laid upon the bed for the use of the lady, whose wardrobe was, of course, understood to be left behind at Llyndell.

The kind-hearted hostess officiated as lady's-maid, and after undressing her guest, and seeing her in bed, she withdrew, taking the light, and leaving the lady to her much-needed quietness and repose. And thus Constance passed the second night after her marriage.

The jailer's little family kept very early hours, so that about the dawn of day Constance was awakened from her restless sleep by the suppressed stir of the little household around her. She immediately arose, for there was much to be done which she wished to complete before the hour of opening the prison, so that she might, if possible, pass all the remainder of the day in her husband's cell. She quickly made her simple toilet—a plain gray silk dress, with white collar and cuffs, and her dark hair plainly parted over her broad forehead, and gathered in a large roll at the nape of the neck—and was ready to partake of her early breakfast.

Immediately after the morning meal, she despatched Willie, the son of the warden, to order her carriage and horses from the livery stable where they had been left, as she wished to send to Llyndell for her own and Mr. Mostyn's wardrobes. To her surprise and vexation, the lad returned with the news that her equipage had, on the preceding day, been withdrawn and sent home by Colonel North. This event was not more embarrassing in itself than indicative of future petty persecutions of the same sort. With some difficulty, Constance at length procured a messenger with a cart, to carry an order to Llyndell for her own and Mr.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Mostyn's luggage. And this business despatched, she went to her husband's cell, where she purposed to spend the day.

During the forenoon Mr. Mostyn made out a brief, which Constance assisted him in transcribing, and copies of which he sent, with retaining fees, to his colleague, Mr. Jones, of London, and to his friend, Mr. Wright, of Edinburgh, accompanied by a request that those gentlemen would, if possible, come down to defend him.

Late in the evening the cart returned from Llyndell with Mr. Mostyn's trunks and boxes. But instead of Constance's luggage, came a note from Colonel North, refusing to send any portion of her personal effects, and commanding her instant return to Llyndell.

Now, Constance, who had determined never to disturb the harassed mind of her husband with her own personal vexations, had his luggage quietly brought into the lobby outside of his cell, and, in regard to her own, kept silence. She knew the imperious temper of her guardian, and knew also that he had no right to detain her personal effects; and these effects, particularly her jewels and pocket-money, she needed very much to pay expenses and provide present comforts. She accordingly formed her plan, and waited for the next morning to put it into execution. Mr. Brent, of the Temple, who had been her husband's first groomsman, was now in town, at the hotel, waiting the leisure of his friend to offer his services for the defence. Early on the third morning, therefore, Constance addressed a note to this gentleman, requesting him to see her at her lodgings. And when he came, she explained her position, and requested him to attend her to Llyndell, whither she wished to go and demand her property. Mr. Brent readily consented; and Constance, with the approbation of Mr. Mostyn, departed under his escort for Llyndell, where she arrived in the afternoon.

But little did the lady anticipate the storm of indignation, invectives, and reproaches, that was to meet her there. Her grandmother, who was still ill from the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

effects of the shock she had received, accused her of bringing her 'gray hairs down in sorrow to the grave.' Colonel North reproached her with disobedience, imprudence, and immodesty. And even her young cousins, amid tears of grief and anger, charged her with ruining all their own prospects, by clinging to her 'felon' bridegroom. And all, with one accord, gave her to understand that, in the event of her returning to him, neither aid, comfort, nor countenance, was to be hoped from her own family, who would thereupon and thenceforward discard and disown her. All this Constance bore with great composure, firmness, and patience—only, at the end of all, quietly requesting to be put in possession of her personal effects. These were for some time refused, until, at the suggestion of Constance, Mr. Brent interfered, reminding the colonel that, in the event of his continued refusal, a suit would be commenced against him, which would not greatly tend to the elevation of his credit. So, finally, by coolness, patience, and perseverance, Constance and her advocate conquered. The effects were given up; and, pursued by the evil prophecies of the proud, worldly, and imperious family, the lady and her escort set out for Gwyn, which they reached at midnight. Even more than the heavy calamity that hung over her head, did this petty, contemptible, humiliating family warfare distract and depress the mind of the high-spirited girl. She was almost content that the hour was so late when she arrived, that the prison doors were closed, and that a night must intervene before she could present herself before her husband.

It was but a few days from this date, when quite a sensation was created in town by the arrest of Alice Owen, who was discovered in a mountain gipsy's hut, where she was supposed to be hiding from the subpœna. As it was believed that her testimony would be the most important, and as it was feared that she would again elude the vigilance of the officers, and escape, to avoid testifying, she was required to enter into a recognizance with her securities, Drs. Horne and Heath, for her appearance at the present term of assizes, to give

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

evidence in the approaching trial of Gerald Mostyn for the murder of Hugh Horne.

It was on the third morning succeeding the arrest of Alice Owen, that Messrs. Jones and Wright arrived in town, and after a visit to the cell of the prisoner, with Mr. Brent, adjourned to a private parlour in the hotel, where they had a long consultation, in which it was arranged how the three should conduct the defence.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TRIAL AT THE ASSIZES.

ON that January morning the sun arose over a wild winter scene. The snow that had been falling fast for the three preceding days now covered the earth to the depth of two feet. The clouds had all dispersed, and the unblemished whiteness of the ground, under the unveiled radiance of the sunshine, was perfectly dazzling. It was the morning of the trial. Mr. Mostyn arose early, and was soon afterwards joined by his wife. He had dressed himself, with his accustomed careful attention to propriety, in his favourite costume, a suit of clerical black, relieved by delicate linen; his fine, raven-black hair was parted on the left side, and swept off freely from his broad forehead, now somewhat blanched by anxiety and confinement. An ample black cloth cloak, lined with sable, hung upon his left shoulder, and was partly gathered upon his left arm. In his right hand he held his black beaver hat.

Constance wore a black silk dress, and black velvet mantilla and bonnet, and a black lace veil—the darkness of her costume relieved by a delicate white lace collar and cuffs, and light kid gloves.

Tasteful, becoming, and appropriate as was their costume, it had been assumed by each without an instant's forethought. They had, Heaven knows, enough of more important business to occupy their minds, and this attention to appearance was a mere mechanical matter of habit. Yet they were a hand-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

some, stately, imposing couple as they stood together—he holding her hand, gazing in her face, and murmuring, in grave tones—

"A fortnight ago to-day, dearest Constance, I arose the happiest man in England—for it was to be our wedding-day—and now——"

"You are required to be the *bravest*, as you are assuredly, by one heart at least, the most respected and the best beloved," said Constance, finishing his sentence, with a voice and look of high encouragement.

"May the Lord bless you and reward you, my own heroic wife."

"May He save us both! And now, while we have the opportunity, let us kneel and pray for His presence in the coming trial."

In the prison cell, beside the prison cot, they knelt and implored the Father to be with them through the coming day; to guard them from all evil, to guide them into all good, to strengthen their weakness, to enlighten their darkness; to comfort them in affliction, or bless them in joy; to direct them in all emergencies, and sanctify to them every event; to give them a happy delivery out of all their troubles, and to save them evermore, through His mercy in the Divine Redeemer.

"And now, whatever be the issue of this day, beloved one, we shall know that it is all for the best," said Mr. Mostyn, as they arose from their knees.

Approaching steps, and a rap at the cell door, followed by the turning of the key, announced the arrival of the sheriff, to conduct the prisoner to the court.

On entering the cell, Mr. Harrison bowed very lowly to the lady, and respectfully intimated his errand to the prisoner.

"We are ready to attend you, sir," said Mr. Mostyn, drawing the arm of his wife within his own, and gathering up the folds of his ample cloak.

"But will madam accompany us?" inquired the sheriff.

"It is her desire, sir, if there is no objection."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Oh, assuredly not."

Preceded by the sheriff, and followed by two constables, Mr. Mostyn, with Constance, deeply veiled and hanging on his arm, left the prison, and passed out into the street. It was of course the first day since his committal that he had set foot outside the prison enclosure.

Severe as the weather had been, impeded as the roads were, the village was full of strangers, drawn together by the thrilling interest of the approaching trial; and the village street was crowded with coaches, chaises, gigs, and saddle-horses, and thronged with foot passengers, all making their way towards the court-house.

Those were not the days of ambrotypes, cheap wood cuts, and illustrated newspapers; the faces of the prisoner, his wife, the sheriff, and "all concerned," were not familiar as "household" forms to every stranger in town; therefore, Mr. and Mrs. Mostyn, with their escort, passed unmolested through the crowd to the court-house, which was situated one square above the prison, on the same side of the street.

The space before the building, the stairs, the porch, the passage leading to the court-room, and the court-room itself, were densely thronged with an eager and expectant multitude.

Here the sheriff, being obliged to exercise his official authority to have a way cleared through the crowd, his identity and that of the prisoner and his companion became suspected, and a great tumult arose among the excited spectators, anxious to get a view of the party. And it was some time before the constables succeeded in making a way for the prisoner, through the press of people that filled the court-room, to the place appointed for him.

During the preliminary forms of the trial, Mr. Mostyn remained seated in front of the bench, having his counsel on his right hand, and his wife on his left. He sat with his form erect, his head raised and slightly thrown back, his large cloak falling from his shoulder, his proud gaze calmly regarding the proceedings of the court, or

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

the persons of the spectators. Constance sat still and silent beside him, with her black lace veil dropped before her pale face.

On the bench the celebrated Baron Wold presided.

The attorney-general was the distinguished John Henry Cole; associated with him in the prosecution was the no less eminent Peter Cawdow.

Opposed to them for the defence, were Messrs. Jones, Wright, and Brent, all of them rising young barristers, and two of them since of world-wide fame in the science of jurisprudence.

Among the sea of heads around, behind, and on each side of him, the prisoner recognized many friends, acquaintances, and relatives from the country, and several of his colleagues and companions from London.

Some among them returned his glance by a bow of friendly recognition, while others looked up, down, to the right, or to the left, to avoid meeting his eye. The former charitably hoped in his innocence, the latter thoroughly believed in his guilt.

While Mr. Mostyn was making these observations, the business of the court was progressing. When the preliminaries were over, the prisoner was arraigned by the usual formula, and the indictment—charging Gerald Mostyn of the County of Denbigh, with the wilful and felonious murder of Hugh Horne, of the said county, by the cutting of his throat with a razor, on the morning of the 26th of December, 18—, was read. Then the clerk of the court, addressing the prisoner, asked—

"Gerald Mostyn, how say you—are you guilty or not guilty of the felony with which you are indicted?"

Mr. Mostyn, who was standing with his stately form drawn up to its haughtiest height, his large cloak hanging gracefully from one shoulder, and drawn up on his arm, and his right hand raised, answered calmly, almost scornfully—

"NOT GUILTY."

"How will you be tried?"

"By God and my country," replied the prisoner, with dignity, folding his cloak around him, and resuming his seat.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

The prosecuting attorney, Cole, arose, and opened the indictment. He said :—Incredible as the statement might appear, that a crime of such atrocious nature as that set forth in the indictment they were about to try, could be perpetrated by a man of such distinguished reputation as the prisoner at the bar, yet by the testimony about to be offered, he should place the fact beyond the shadow of a doubt : that this testimony was so clear, so consecutive, so conclusive, that it would need no art in its arrangement, no logic in its presentation, no eloquence in its illustration ; that he should offer nothing but the simple, overwhelming, and convicting FACTS. He then proceeded to make a statement of the circumstances that led to the arrest of the prisoner, and with which the reader is too well acquainted to need the repetition here.

The prisoner and his devoted wife listened to this indictment with undisturbed attention and unshaken firmness. Only Constance, at the most distressing section of the charge, raised her eyes to his with a gaze full of unwavering faith and courage.

At the close of his speech, the attorney-general proceeded to call the witnesses for the prosecution. It had been his intention to place Alice Owen first upon the stand, as the first discoverer of the murder ; but the extreme agitation of the poor girl, who sat clothed in deep mourning, closely veiled, and cowering between Mr. Osborne and Dr. Heath, rendered it expedient to give her time to recover her composure. And the attorney-general proceeded with the next witness, who was equally well fitted to lead off the prosecution.

Dr. Horne, nephew of the deceased, being duly sworn, testified that a long estrangement had existed between the prisoner at the bar and the deceased ; that the deceased had made a will, in which he had cut off the prisoner with a shilling, and left the whole of his vast property to the witness ; that after the funeral of the deceased the will could nowhere be found ; and that consequently the prisoner came into the undisputed possession of the patrimonial estate. Being cross-examined, he admitted that there had been a reconcilia-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

tion between the deceased and the prisoner, upon the day preceding the murder, and that the deceased had mentioned his intention to make a new will in equal favour of the prisoner and the witness—a plan approved by all the three concerned. He farther testified to having left the deceased in his usual health at four o'clock on the afternoon preceding the murder. He was then permitted to sit down.

The next witness called was Mrs. Horne, who, pale, trembling, and half fainting, was placed at the stand. She corroborated her husband's testimony in every particular; and then, in pity of her state, was permitted to retire without cross-examination.

The third witness, Hayhurst, the bailiff, or farm manager, late in the employment of the deceased, being sworn, testified to the midnight alarm, the gathering at the house, the finding of the body, and the condition of the room. A severe cross-examination failed either to weaken the old facts or to elicit new ones; and so he was suffered to retire.

The next two witnesses were the wife and son of the preceding, who corroborated his testimony both in the first statement and the cross-examination.

Then Dr. Heath, placed at the stand and sworn, testified to being summoned to Horne's Hole on the morning of the 26th of December; to the finding of the dead body; the condition of the room and the persons present; and gave a report of the post-mortem examination of the body, and the nature and extent of the wound the cause of the death; and being cross-examined without other results, was permitted to retire.

Then Colonel North, being called and duly sworn, testified to the finding of the body; the state of the room; the company present, and was cross-examined without effect, and suffered to retire.

The next witness gave but a repetition of the late evidence.

Hounsloe, the hunter, was then summoned to take the stand, and being duly sworn, testified to the finding of the blood-stained clothing, the razor, tablets, and other personal effects bearing the name of the prisoner.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

The constable to whom he had at once carried the packet corroborated his testimony.

Dr. Horne, being recalled, identified the garments as those worn by the prisoner at the Christmas dinner preceding the murder.

During the examination and cross-examination of the last three witnesses, a pin might have been heard to fall if dropped in that room, so deep was the silence, so fixed the attention, so intense the interest.

As pale, as firm, as motionless as a pair of marble statues, sat the prisoner and his wife—their eyes resting upon each other, or fixed upon the witness or the prosecuting attorney.

But when the name of Alice Owen was called, and the beautiful girl, clothed in deep mourning, moved slowly forward to the stand, and putting aside her veil, stood with downcast eyes, whose long black lashes rested upon colourless cheeks, deeply shadowed by thick clouds of ebon ringlets, the silence deepened, the attention became more fixed, the interest more painful. Being sworn, the maiden was addressed by the attorney general:—

"Witness, look upon the prisoner at the bar."

Alice turned, and sent one quick, and quickly withdrawn, glance at the face of Gerald Mostyn. The blood rushed in torrents, crimsoning her brow, and then retreating, left it pale as marble; a shudder passed through her whole frame; the perspiration burst in cold drops upon her forehead; she tottered, leaned forward upon the railing for support, and cast an imploring gaze into the face of the judge. Baron Wold did not speak, but his answering look said, plainly—"My child, you cannot help yourself, nor can we help you; you must perform your painful duty."

"A glass of water," said Dr. Heath.

A bailiff brought the required refreshment, and the doctor himself pushed forward, and placed it to the lips of the witness, saying, encouragingly—

"My dear Alice, be firm, I entreat you."

She quaffed the water, and returned the glass. Dr. Heath retreated, and the attorney-general said—

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Now, witness, you have looked upon the prisoner at the bar; do you know him?"

"I do, sir," answered Alice, in an expiring voice, without raising her eyes from the floor.

"Tell the jury, then, all that you know in regard to this crime for which he stands indicted."

Alice convulsively clasped her hands, threw up an imploring glance at the bench, but, meeting no mercy there, and being again urged by the attorney-general, she commenced, in a trembling voice—

"On the night of the 25th of December, at ten o'clock I let out Mr. Gerald Mostyn, who had been dining and spending the evening with the deceased and myself at Horne's Hole."

"Did you notice what clothes were worn by the prisoner at the time you let him out?"

"He wore the cloak he now wears. I do not know what he wore under that."

"Do you know what clothes he had on at the Christmas dinner upon the day in question?"

"Yes, sir."

"What were they?"

"A black cloth dress-coat and trousers, and a black satin vest."

"Take this suit in your hands, and examine it well. Is this the same worn by the prisoner at the Christmas dinner?" inquired the prosecutor, placing the blood-stained garments before the witness.

"Yes, sir, this is the same," replied Alice, after a careful examination of the clothing.

"Did he wear this suit when he left the house?"

"Sir, I could not see what he wore under his cloak when he left the house."

"Have you any reason to suppose he changed his clothing between the hour of retiring to Mr. Horne's room and that of his leaving the house?"

"No, sir, I have no reason to suppose he did."

"Go on, then, with your statement. What happened after the departure of the prisoner?"

"I shut up the house carefully; then went into Mr. Horne's room, and finding him wakeful, sat down

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

beside his bed and sung to him in a low voice, until he went to sleep; then closed up his room, and put a log of wood on the fire to keep it burning; then went into the parlour and took another look at the fastenings; and then went up to my bedroom, which was immediately over that of the deceased. There was no one in the great lonely house but myself and the old man, and he was sound asleep. I could not sleep; the late hour, the loneliness of the scene, the melancholy howling of the wind through the rocks and ravines of the mountains near, and an undefinable feeling of dread, all combined to keep me awake. I was aroused by one single, prolonged shriek. I sprang up in an icy chill of terror, and listened; but as all was silent and dark, I could not know whether I had dreamed or really heard that cry. While listening so, I heard a half-smothered struggling and scuffling, as if upon the floor of the room beneath mine; then a rise, a heavy fall, and a groan. Thinking only of the helpless old man—carried forward in spite of excessive terror, I struck a light and hastened down below. By the strong draught through the lower hall, that nearly extinguished my light, I knew that some door or window had been opened. I passed rapidly through the parlour, that I found in the same state in which I had left it, and opened the door connected with Mr. Horne's room—"

Here the witness suddenly stopped, shuddered, grew deadly white in the face, sunk in her chair, and dropped her head forward upon the railings.

The attorney-general gave her time; but after a few minutes, inquired—

"Well, witness, what next? When you opened the door connecting with Mr. Horne's chamber, what did you see?"

She raised her head, shivered, and replied, in cold and hollow tones—

"Opposite to the door by which I entered I saw the open window, which nearly extinguished my light, and a man escaping through it——"

"Did you recognize that man?"

"Yes, sir."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Who was it?"

"It was—the prisoner," said the witness, in a dying voice.

Here Gerald Mostyn and Constance started simultaneously, and fixed their eyes in horror upon the young girl, whom they could not believe to be otherwise than most atrociously perjured.

But the pale, suffering, and most holy countenance of the poor maiden proved that whatever her pain might be, it could not be that of remorse.

"Well, what then?" inquired the attorney-general.

"I felt something at my feet—looked down, and—O, Heaven of Heavens!—I saw Mr. Hugh Horne lying doubled up on the floor, with his face and his gray hair in a pool of his blood."

"Was he—at the time you first discovered him lying thus—was he quite dead?"

"I thought so when I saw him, sir," answered Alice, in the same freezing, shuddering tones.

"Witness! remember that you are upon your oath; do not, therefore, prevaricate. I ask you to state distinctly to the jury whether, when you first discovered Mr. Hugh Horne lying in that position, he was quite dead?"

"No, sir, he was not," replied Alice, with extreme reluctance.

"What did you do?"

"I raised his head, turning it over from the pool of blood, and cried out, 'O, my God! who has done this?'"

"Did the dying man speak?"

Alice shuddered, but did not answer.

"Witness, remember that you are under oath to tell the 'whole' truth. Did the deceased speak before his death?" "Yes, sir, he did."

"What did he say?"

"When I cried, 'O, my God! who has done this?'" he answered—

"'*O Alice! Gerald Mostyn, my grandson, has done it.*'"

"And then his head slipped heavily from my arms, and he was dead—and I——"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Here the last shade of colour faded from the very lips of the witness, her eyes closed, her chin dropped, and overwhelmed by many emotions, she sank back fainting in the arms of Dr. Heath.

"My God, my God! am I sane or mad!" exclaimed Gerald Mostyn, in a low, deep, thrilling voice, upon hearing this crushing testimony.

"Oh, be courageous! be yourself! Still trust in Heaven!" cried Constance.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SENTENCE OF DEATH.

UPON the retirement of the last witness, the court adjourned until ten o'clock the next day. Then the sheriff presented himself to conduct the prisoner from the place. Mr. Mostyn arose to follow him. Constance stood up, drew her veil over her face, and slipped her arm within that of her husband.

And in perfect silence, and under the battery of an hundred pairs of eyes, they passed out of the court-room, down the street, and into the prison.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when the hapless pair found themselves once more left alone in the cell. They sat down together on the side of the cot, her hand clasped in his, their eyes fixed in dreadful silence on the ground. He was the first to break the dumb spell.

"My Constance, what think you of all this?"

"Think? What do I think?—that it is an inscrutable mystery—perhaps a successful conspiracy—God knows!" she ejaculated, convulsively closing her fingers upon the hand that held her own.

"And—no slightest shade of suspicion of my possible guilt disturbs your mind?"

She answered him only by a look.

"What, my own dearest? You trust me despite the overwhelming evidence?"

Still that eloquent look.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"O, Constance, my wife! You confide in me, notwithstanding the testimony of the blood-stained garments, the razor identified as mine, and the last words of the dying man, charging me with his murder?"

Yet that most eloquent look!—that look of undying, unwavering, ineffable trust!

"Now may the Lord of Heaven bless you, my wife—my wife—for your faith is my greatest stay in this most bitter hour!"

With a gesture of adoring confidence she raised the hand that held hers, and pressed it to her heart.

"But, sweet Constance, you are, of all this world, the only one who has faith in my innocence," he said, sorrowfully.

"If it be so, it is because I am the only one who knows you thoroughly, as why should I not? Am I not your second self?—the heart of your heart?"

"And soul of my soul—spirit of my spirit—life of my life! Yes, you are all these, my own—my own!" he said, gathering her to his bosom. Then, after a few moments, he added—

"Constance, you have great firmness?"

"When you demand it of me—yes, yes! Whatever you require of me I have, or by God's grace, I will acquire! Test my firmness."

"Hear me, then, my Constance," he said, with deep solemnity. "I shall be convicted."

"Without Divine interposition," she reverently replied.

"And after conviction I shall be—*executed!*"

"Without 'Divine interposition,'—yes," she repeated.

"Constance!—my Constance!—the days of miracles are past."

"But not of 'Divine interposition,'" she reiterated. "Man's extremity is God's opportunity. O, let us appeal to Him."

Leaving this most unhappy couple to the sacred privacy of their sorrow, we will look into the village street, to discover the popular feeling there. Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour—now near sunset—the inclemency of the weather—and the bad state of the roads,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

neighbouring farmers, who should have been on their way homeward, strangers who should have been comfortably housed in lodgings, and villagers who would have been safer by their own firesides, were gathered into groups at the corners, or loitering before the shop doors, or lingering in front of the court-house, or of the hotel, earnestly engaged in the discussion of the trial. There was but one opinion, a general belief in the prisoner's guilt; and but one expectation, a unanimous prophecy of his impending conviction and certain execution. And true as sad it is to say, that the majority of those present looked forward to beholding all the remaining scenes of the passing reality with more zest than they could have felt in witnessing the successive acts of some fine tragedy.

At ten o'clock the next morning the court met. The room was, if possible, more crowded, and with a more eager audience than upon the preceding day.

A few minutes after ten, the prisoner, accompanied by his wife, was brought in.

Mr. Mostyn was placed in the dock, and his wife seated herself immediately below it. As soon as they had sat down, Gerald raised his head, and Constance drew aside her veil, and those nearest to them then saw how pale and worn they had become since the previous day.

The business of the trial proceeded. Alice Owen had been the last witness examined by the prosection. The counsel for the prisoner, reserving his privilege of cross-examining this deponent, arose and opened the defence.

The gentlemen of the jury had heard, he said, the indictment, charging his client with a crime so unnatural, so atrocious, so impossible, that no one looking now upon his face, would, upon any evidence less forcible than that of their own senses, believe him guilty. They had farther heard, he continued, the testimony brought forward to sustain that indictment—testimony which, however weighty it might be made to appear by the skill of his learned brother, was, at the very best, but circumstantial evidence, the least to be trusted, the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

most uncertain, the most deceptive in the annals of jurisprudence, and light as levity itself when cast in the opposite scale with—he would not say the distinguished position, brilliant talents, and splendid career of his client—but with the irreproachable character of Gerald Mostyn. Here he enlarged upon the many eminent and well-known virtues of the prisoner, and cited many well-authenticated instances of his strict integrity, warm benevolence, and prompt generosity, under circumstances calculated to severely test these shining qualities. Should a chain of merely circumstantial evidence, however strong, have power to ruin a man with the character of sterling honour, disinterested charity, and high magnanimity, universally conceded to his client? Forbid it, justice.

Then he animadverted on the nature, history, and tendencies of circumstantial evidence in general, and citing several celebrated cases in particular, in which guiltless persons had perished under testimony more convincing, overwhelming, and destructive than any that had been brought against his client, he instanced the well-known trials of Jennings, Crow, Shaw, and several others, all clearly convicted, and incontinently executed, for crimes committed and afterwards confessed by others.*

These instances of the fatal fallibility of circumstantial evidence were such as had happened to come to our knowledge, he said, but of how often the innocent had suffered instead of the guilty, without any event arising in time to save their lives, or afterwards to vindicate their honour, no one but God knew or could know until the day of the last judgment.

It behoved jurors, then, to be very cautious in giving any weight to such evidence, even where the criminating circumstances were left unexplained, as they should not be in the case of his client, for he was about to offer an explanation, which, taken conjointly with the high character of Mr. Mostyn, would not only secure

* These cases may be found recorded, under the head of "Circumstantial Evidence," in a book published about twenty years ago, entitled "Celebrated Trials."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

an honourable acquittal, but would compel a triumphant vindication. The jury, he confidently anticipated, would, before leaving their seats, return a verdict in his client's favour. He then entered upon the elucidation of the opposite testimony. The prosecutor, he said, had made a great point of the estrangement existing between the prisoner and the deceased. He should prove by a most important witness that had been used for the prosecution, that the estrangement had ceased, and that the reconciliation had been complete. He should call his witnesses, he said, at each point of his statement which he wished them to prove.

He then requested that Miss Alice Owen should take the stand.

Alice came forward, pale and trembling as before, but being questioned as to the state of feeling between the prisoner and the deceased up to the day of his death, she recovered her spirits, and testified with alacrity to the perfect reconciliation and warm regard between Mr. Hugh Horne and his grandson, Gerald Mostyn. She was then permitted to retire.

Mr. Wright resumed his argument. The learned prosecutor, he went on, had made, or endeavoured to make, a very salient point of the suppositious circumstance that his client had been opposed to the projected will of the deceased. But he should prove by *another* witness, who had been called for the prosecution, that not only was his client entirely concurrent in the plan of that will, but that after the funeral of the deceased, when the will could nowhere be found, as it probably never had had an existence, he—his client—had declared himself bound by its understood purposes, and resolved to carry out its intended provisions.

He then summoned Dr. Horne, who, with great apparent satisfaction, testified to these facts, and was permitted to retire.

The counsel for the defence continued his argument. The finding of the blood-stained garments, tablets, handkerchief, razor, and other articles, identified as the property of his client, seemed a very strong piece of circumstantial evidence, but how very weak before the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

force of truth. That those garments had been worn, and those blood-stained articles handled by the real murderer, no one could doubt; but that murderer was not the prisoner at the bar; his client had put off those clothes, and had left them hanging up in his dressing-room, when he left the house at ten o'clock at night.

Here he recalled Alice Owen, who testified that the prisoner, upon leaving the old man's chamber before ten o'clock, had gone into his dressing-room, where he had remained quite long enough to have changed his clothes.

The advocate went on. Doubtless, he said, that the real murderer, with purpose aforethought to save himself and implicate another in the crime, had stolen into the house; by the light of the fire had seen the suit of clothes on the wall; had doffed his own and donned them; had done the dark deed, and then, to clear himself of all signs of guilt, had again changed clothes, and had buried the blood-stained suit where they were afterwards found.

There was, he said, a final piece of evidence to be overthrown—that of Miss Alice Owen, in regard to what she *supposed* she saw and heard upon her discovery of murder. First, as to what she supposed she saw—a man whom she recognized as Mr. Gerald Mostyn, escaping from the window. Now the fact was that she saw a *suit of clothes* which she recognized as Gerald Mostyn's, on the person of a man whom she could have no possibility of recognizing at all—escaping by the window.

The young girl here evinced more fear than she had betrayed during this second appearance.

"Witness, you said that upon entering the chamber of Mr. Horne immediately after the murder, you saw a man hurrying out through the window, and that you knew him, the fugitive, to be Mr. Gerald Mostyn. Now, be good enough to tell us *how* you knew him."

"By his size and his suit of clothes, which was the same that Mr. Mostyn wore at the Christmas dinner that day."

"Then you did not see his face?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"No, sir; his head was entirely out of the window."

"So you see, gentlemen of the jury, to what this overwhelming item in the circumstantial evidence dwindles down. The young lady saw—a suit of clothes! I propose, in default of a flesh and blood murderer being found, that the guilty suit of clothes be convicted. So much for what the young lady supposed she saw; now for what she heard. She heard the deceased with dying lips declare—"Oh, Alice, my grandson, Gerald Mostyn, has done this!" Conclusive testimony against the prisoner, you will say! Let us see if it be! And let us closely attend while the witness answers the few questions that I shall put to her. Witness, at the time you heard the half-smothered cry of murder, and the half-suppressed scuffling in the chamber below your own, did you hear any one speak?"

"No sir."

"No one spoke?"

"No sir."

"Had any one spoken in that room below, would you have heard it?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you know?"

"Because the planks of my floor are warped wide apart; the plastering of the ceiling under it is broken in many places; so every word comes from the chamber below up into my room."

"Ah! gentlemen of the jury! notice this fact—no word was spoken in that chamber below! *the struggle was a silent one!* Witness, when you struck a light and went down into that chamber, was there any other light in the room?"

"No sir."

"It was totally dark, then?"

"Until I brought the candle it had been so, sir, except for the faint light from the smouldering fire on the hearth of Mr. Mostyn's dressing-room which was adjoining, the door between being open."

"Notice, gentlemen, the struggle with the unknown murderer took place in *silence and darkness.* Now, witness, what was the age of Mr. Horne?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Ninety-one, I believe, sir," she said.

"Were his sight and hearing good?"

"His sight, sir, was almost extinct."

"Ah! gentlemen, notice if you please. I repeat—the struggle between Mr. Horne and his unknown murderer took place *in utter silence and in partial darkness.* Now, under such circumstances, how is it possible that a purblind old man of ninety-one should be able to identify his destroyer? By the faint, low glimmer of the smouldering fire on the hearth of the adjoining room, he identified the clothes, and was thus led into the same error as that of Miss Owen. This evidence is strong against the clothes, which certainly should be convicted, but proves nothing against my client, whose life, character, and conduct, form an absolute refutation to so preposterous a charge."

Here the advocate called in succession a large number of highly respectable witnesses, among whom were the Reverend Mr. Osborne, Dr. Horne, Dr. Heath, Colonel North, and Mr. Maraudy, some of whom had known Mr. Gerald Mostyn from childhood to manhood, and esteemed him as a model of integrity in all the relations of life. When the last witness had retired, the advocate reviewed his whole argument—the full reconciliation and the mutual regard existing between the prisoner and the deceased at the time of his death; the plans of the one, meeting the full concurrence of the other; the perfect willingness of the latter to carry out the purposes of the projected will of the former; the strong fact of the prisoner having put off the dress suit and left it in his own room when he departed from the house, hours before the death of the deceased; the circumstances of the death-struggle having taken place in perfect silence and darkness, making it impossible for a man, ninety-one years old, two-thirds blind and deaf with age, to identify his murderer; the proverbial fallibility of circumstantial evidence in general, and its especial unreliability as arrayed against the irreproachable character of Gerald Mostyn.

The advocate wound up by a logical and eloquent appeal to the reason and the feeling of the jury, and sat

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

down. He was followed by the assistant-counsel for the defence, Mr. Bent, in an ingenious and closely reasoned argument. And then the defence rested.

The attorney-general arose in his place. He summed up the points of the evidence in an overwhelming mass of testimony against the prisoner, and dismissed the whole of the argument for the defence with the half-contemptuous assertion that its only essential points rested simply upon the word of the prisoner, and wanted proof. Acute logic, and scathing sarcasm marked his powerful peroration, and he sat down amid a deep and ominous silence.

The venerable judge then arose to charge the jury.

They had heard, commenced his lordship, the indictment charging the prisoner at the bar with the murder of Hugh Horne, on the morning of the twenty-sixth of December; they had heard the testimony by which that charge was supported; they would give him their attention while he recounted the links in the chain of evidence. The judge then in turn reviewed the facts as proved — the rebellious boyhood and youth of the prisoner; the long estrangement between the latter and the deceased; the very recent reconciliation; the fact that the prisoner, of all men in the world, seemed the most interested that the death of the deceased should take place at the time it actually did occur; since by his dying that day intestate, the prisoner, as heir-at-law, would come into immediate possession of his whole real and personal estate, while, had he lived twenty-four hours longer, to execute the will he planned, the prisoner would have inherited but one-half his property. Thus the prisoner was the person most interested in the event of his death taking place just at the time it occurred; thus the party most to be profited by the crime, and the motive for the deed was established in the person of the prisoner. The motive existing, what was the result? On the night of the murder, in the very moment of discovery, was seen escaping from the window of the victim's chamber, a man whom one witness identified upon oath as the prisoner. A few seconds later the lips of the dying man charged with

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

murder the prisoner at the bar. The clothing found stained with blood was identified by many witnesses as the very suit worn by the prisoner on the day of the murder. These, said his lordship, were the points of evidence against the prisoner. The jury had also heard, he said, the argument for the defence; they would give their attention while he spoke of its main features. Many highly respectable persons, he said, had testified to the excellent character of the prisoner, and their testimony would have its weight with the jury; the defence had given an explanation of the circumstance of the finding of the blood-stained garments; an explanation which, resting entirely upon the unsupported statement of the prisoner, could be of no importance; the defence had further characterized the evidence of the prosecution as circumstantial; but he would instruct the jury that it was not only circumstantial, but *positive*. There was no evidence known to law, he said, stronger or more positive than that of an eye-witness and the declaration of the dying. The dying words of the murdered man and the direct testimony of an eye-witness, were in evidence against the prisoner. If, therefore, they believed this evidence, they were to bring in a verdict in accordance with it. The jury would now retire and deliberate upon their verdict.

The charge of the venerable judge seemed equivalent to an instruction of the jury to convict the prisoner. His lordship resumed his seat amid an ominous stillness.

But how had Gerald Mostyn and his devoted wife heard this terrible charge? Gerald had listened with his fine form erect, his arms folded, his head thrown back, his face pale but firm, his eyes fixed steadily upon the countenance of his judge, save when they turned with unutterable affection to meet the eyes of his wife. Constance had attended with a face as white as a statue's, but as devoted as a martyr's; with bloodless lips compressed, and tearless eyes fixed upon the judge, and ice-cold hands, clasped together on her lap, save when some overwhelming point in the evidence for the prosecution was dwelt upon with dreadful force, then

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

her eyes would seek her husband's eyes, with such ineffable love and trust, as if she sought with her one woman power of faith to roll back the whole overwhelming weight of evidence against him.

Meanwhile, without leaving their places, the jury consulted together for a few moments, and then the foreman arose and announced that their verdict was ready.

This sudden movement was totally unexpected. The stillness and coldness of death crept over the spectators. All present felt that they sat under the awful shadow of the scaffold. For one dread moment all blood was congealed, every breath was suspended, and every heart stopped. The eyes of Constance sought those of her doomed husband; her fingers clasped his hand; her voice whispered—

"There remains God!"

The judge arose.

"Jurors, look upon your prisoner."

The eyes of the twelve rested upon the pale, firm face of Gerald Mostyn.

"Prisoner, look upon the jury."

Mr. Mostyn turned an unflinching gaze upon the men who held his fate in their hands.

"How say you, gentlemen of the jury—is Gerald Mostyn guilty of the felony laid to his charge, or not guilty?"

"GUILTY!" responded the foreman.

"God liveth!"

The lips that breathed these words were pallid with mortal despair, and tremulous with woman's utmost woe! The tones were low, yet through the deep silence that followed the verdict, and filled the court, the words reverberated with awful power. They were an absolute relief to all over whom the fate of the prisoner hung like the blackest pall.

The next sound that broke upon the death-like silence was the voice of the clerk—

"Gerald Mostyn, you have been duly tried and convicted of murder by a jury of your peers. Have you, therefore, anything to say why the judgment of death should not be pronounced upon you?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

The deep voice of the prisoner replied, addressing the judge—

"I have nothing to say, my lord, but what has already been better said by my counsel; nothing that would not uselessly prolong this painful scene, which I entreat, for the sake of all concerned, may be concluded as speedily as possible; nothing, in short, that would not be a mere reiteration of the old absolute truth of my guiltlessness, against overwhelming evidence of my guilt; nothing, in fine, but to express a hope that God may bring that truth to light."

As Gerald Mostyn spoke, so noble, calm, and self-possessed was his bearing, so radiant with truth, faith, and courage was his whole countenance, that there was not a man present but felt shaken in his convictions of his guilt, nor a woman but whose eyes were overflowing with tears. The sound of sobs filled the room. The judge made a sign to the crier, who arose and pronounced the fearful words—

"Let there be silence in the court while sentence of death is pronounced upon the prisoner."

And a silence like death followed, for every sob was hushed, every breath suspended, every pulse stopped.

"Prisoner, arise and receive the sentence of the court," were the next terrible words that broke the stillness.

Mr. Mostyn arose and stood erect, with his arms folded across his chest, his stately head thrown back, his fine countenance undisturbed in proud serenity, his eyes fixed unflinchingly upon the face of the judge.

The venerable judge arose, his reverend face pale with pity for the prisoner and for the hapless lady who sat beside him; his deep voice vibrating with emotion as he pronounced upon the living the doom of the dying.

"Gerald Ross Mostyn — The crime of which you stand convicted, and for which you are about to suffer death, is one of the most heinous that the heart of man can conceive, or the hand of man perpetrate. The time, the place, the circumstances, and the subject of this crime deepen, if anything can deepen, the atrocity

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

of its character. It becomes my painful duty to admonish you that—in view of the clear, impartial trial you have had, the overwhelming weight of the evidence against you, the utter weakness of your defence, and the enormity of the crime of which you stand convicted—for you there is no hope of pardon in this world; and exhort you to seek, through deep repentance, the mercy of that Judge to whom the chief of sinners never appeals in vain, and before whom you are soon to appear. The sentence of the law is that you be taken from this place to the prison whence you came, and thence to the place of execution, and that there you be——"

Constance heard no more! There was a ringing sound as of a rushing river in her ears, a deep darkness like a thunder-cloud before her eyes; her senses reeled; her limbs failed; she nearly swooned, when, by a mighty effort of the will, she caught herself, commanded back her powers, and recovered her self-control. She would not permit herself to give way then and there, to add to his distress! When the sound of many waters had ebbed from her ears, and the dark shadow had rolled from her eyes, and her reason had become steady, and sense, and sight, and hearing were restored, she saw the venerable judge in tears, resume his seat, and heard the order given to remove the prisoner.

As one under the influence of a strange dream, too horrible to be real, she left her seat, and followed her husband from the court.

CHAPTER XXI.

EXPECTING EXECUTION.

IT was dark when they reached the prison. The report of the verdict had preceded them. They were met by the jailer, who, with an even more than usual manner of grave kindness, showed them into the cell, and inquired whether he could in any way serve them.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"No, we want nothing, but to be left alone. We thank you, sir," replied Mr. Mostyn.

The jailer, followed by the turnkey, left the cell.

"I am afraid that he is guilty, Tom Turner!" said the former.

"Yes, sir," was the answer.

"But then, Tom Turner, the more guilty the more to be pitied!"

"True, sir."

"And so, Tom Turner, we must be more respectful and compassionate to him than ever, seeing that remorse and death are punishment enough."

"Surely, sir."

And so the two kind-hearted officers went below.

Left alone in the cell, the wretched pair sunk down, sitting upon the side of the cot, clasping each others hands in perfect silence. Her impulse was to cast herself upon his bosom and give way in floods of tears to the overpowering sense of sorrow that swelled her heart almost to bursting; but with a heroism nearly superhuman, she controlled her emotions, lest they should add to *his* distress, who felt mostly for *her*.

"All is over love," he said, breaking the silence.

"Nay," she replied, woman's eternal fountain of hope springing for a moment in her bosom—"nay, all is *not* over. The Lord liveth and reigneth! Between this day and the day of ——" she could not finish, so he added—

"Execution—"

"The truth may be brought to light. Let us think of, let us hope for, let us pray for that!"

Constance remained in the cell up to the latest permitted moment, and then, with the prayers and blessings of her husband, she took leave for the night. She was accompanied to her lodgings by the kind-hearted jailer. She was met at the door by his compassionate wife, who would have detained her in the parlour, and forced upon her some refreshments, but that the hapless girl, by an imperative wave of the hand, warned off all interruption, and with a swelling heart, and reeling brain, and failing muscles, hastened to her chamber.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

There the almost superhuman firmness that had sustained her through the fearful scenes of the last two days at once and entirely abandoned her. Casting her arms above her head, and throwing herself down upon the floor, she lay, without sound or motion, prostrate in the most abject grief. No sigh, no tear, no prayer broke the awful stillness of her sorrow—a sorrow that annihilated time, and space, and sense. And in that all-absorbing anguish she lay until morning, when the sun shining full through the unclosed blinds, and the busy hands and feet and voices of the household below, warned her that the hour was at hand when her presence would be expected at the prison, and all her firmness required to aid her in sustaining herself in the performance of her duties.

Pale, trembling, and tottering, she arose and reached her washstand, and bathed her head and face. Then she went to the toilet-table to comb her hair, and rearrange her tumbled and disordered dress.

And oh! what a pale, haggard, and despairing face was that which met her view! She scarcely recognized it as her own!

"Oh! I must do better than this. I must not carry a countenance like this into the presence of my husband. Oh, Lord of Mercies! come to me in my extremity. Help me to control both my flesh and my spirit, that I may not grieve, but may console him who so much needs consolation."

Again she bathed her face; and with scrupulous care she arranged her hair and her dress, that no disorder in her appearance might suggest suspicion of the anguish in which she had passed the night. And she knelt and fervently prayed—prayed for resignation, strength, and faith, and for deliverance out of their present great affliction. Then she arose, and commanding a calm and hopeful expression into her corrugated countenance, rang, and ordered her breakfast to be served immediately.

There are many good people who regard creature comforts as the grand panacea for all the ills that

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

flesh is heir to; hence, I suppose, arose the custom of funeral feasts.

Honest Mrs. Wardour was one of this sort. Upon this morning her snowiest damask table-cloth and best china service adorned the table, which was provided with the strongest and most fragrant coffee, the most delicate muffins, the freshest butter, the purest honey, the tenderest beefsteak, and the clearest marmalade to be found on any breakfast-table in the county. But alas! little justice could her hapless guest do to these tempting viands. A little coffee quaffed with difficulty, a morsel of bread swallowed with distress, and she arose, put on her bonnet and shawl, and hastened to the prison.

Near the gate she found Dr. Heath and Mr. Osborne waiting for the hour of opening to be admitted.

Both these gentlemen, upon the committal of Mr. Mostyn, had been inclined to abandon him, for there is nothing that so entirely repels as the discovery, or the supposed discovery, of the guilt of those in whom we had placed implicit confidence. But as soon as a criminal is cast for death, even those the most shocked at his guilt, the most eager in denunciation, the most zealous in prosecution, suddenly grow compassionate, do all they can to alleviate the condition of the convict; nay, had they the power, might remit the punishment.

The two gentlemen who intercepted Constance at the prison gate were of this stamp. Their faces wore the expression of profoundest sympathy. They accosted Constance with deep respect, and informed her of the errand that had brought them thither. She returned thanks, and then, addressing Dr. Heath, said—

"Doctor, my physical powers fail me, and I would not have the failure of my frame to add one feather's weight to the load of grief oppressing my husband's heart. Tell me, therefore, is there 'any balm in Gilead' to restore my energies?"

While Dr. Heath gazed in silent and respectful sympathy upon her, Mr. Osborne reverentially raised his hand, and said—

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"*Pray*, my dear child. Appeal to the Source of Power, who, has promised that 'as thy day is, so shall thy strength be.'"

"I do, sir; I pray daily, hourly, and I am *heard*, for I receive the promise. My spirit is strong—strong to endure and to attempt; but my flesh, sir, is very, very weak; I would have something to keep nerve and muscle up to their work; therefore, Doctor," she said, suddenly turning to Dr. Heath—"tell me if there is any thing in *materia medica* that will aid me in this?"

"Assuredly there is, madam; Providence never left us without remedy for the most distressing of physical ailments—the wear and tear of sorrow and anxiety. I will send you a safe restorative and support."

"I thank you, sir."

The gates being opened, they entered the prison and went up to the cell. They found Mr. Mostyn calm, firm, and self-possessed as heretofore. A night of solitude, self-examination, and prayer, had renewed his spirit's strength. The two gentlemen offered their services in any manner in which they could be made available to the prisoner. And their proffers were frankly accepted in case there should be need. A man of more arrogance and less justice than Gerald Mostyn might have repudiated these offers, and replied—

"Since you cannot accept me as guiltless, I cannot permit you to serve me."

But Mr. Mostyn, in a more Christian spirit, answered—

"Since you cannot get over the evidence that has convicted me, and yet still accord me your good wishes and good offices, I thank you, and in case of need, will avail myself of your kindness, feeling sure, that sooner or later, in time or in eternity, you will know me to be guiltless, even as my Constance knows it now."

We will not linger over this interview, or over those that followed. It is enough to say that Constance, by constant prayer, and by the occasional aid of a restorative, by using all spiritual and material means, was enabled to sustain her firm, calm, and cheerful demeanour throughout the day, in the presence of her husband,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

however utterly she gave way and broke down at night in the solitude of her chamber. Mr. Mostyn maintained his calmness, courage, and self-possession. One favour he took occasion privately to request of the sheriff; it was that, when the death-warrant arrived, it might be read in the absence of his wife. This request was, of course, respected. The warrant came within the week, and fixed the day of execution for the 1st of February ensuing. The sheriff took occasion to read it to the prisoner during the temporary absence of Constance upon some business in the village. Upon her return she found nothing in the countenance or demeanour of her husband to suggest that anything unusual had occurred.

But while they sat together, he reading the Bible, and commenting upon its divine words, and she engaged in some little needlework for his comfort, the door was opened and the jailer appeared, asking, with his usual air of grave respect—

"Will Mr. Mostyn receive his counsel?"

"Certainly; admit them at once, Mr. Wardour," replied the prisoner.

And Messrs. Wright and Brent walked into the cell. With those already within, they almost filled the narrow space. Bowing deeply to Constance, Mr. Wright passed to the side of the prisoner, and said, in a low voice—

"We have come upon business, is it your pleasure that it should be broached in the presence of this lady?"

"Assuredly, sir. You witnessed the deportment of my wife during the trial, and can have no doubt of her firmness," replied Mr. Mostyn.

"Then," said Mr. Wright, "we think that the moment has arrived when it is proper and expedient to draw up a petition for pardon to be presented to the Home Secretary.

"A petition I do not object to. I cannot, however, consent that it shall be for *pardon*, inasmuch as that would be a virtual confession of a crime never committed—neither do I think such a petition would be

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

granted. But let it be for *respite*, that more opportunity may be afforded for the discovery of truth, and the establishment of my innocence—innocence which must be reiterated and insisted upon. Such a petition would also be more reasonable and more likely to be granted."

To this view of the case the counsel acceded, and after some little further consultation, they retired to draw up the document.

CHAPTER XXII.

A RESPITE UPON CERTAIN CONDITIONS.

THE petition for respite was drawn up by Mr. Wright, read and approved by Mr. Mostyn, and signed by a large number of persons—even by those who, during the trial, had been most denunciatory, but who, since the prisoner was sentenced to death, were the most sympathizing, and also by conscientious persons, who would have refused to put their names to a pardon, but readily signed one for respite.

Mr. Wright undertook the journey to London to present the petition to the Home Secretary. It was an affair of several days, which were passed in great anxiety by the unhappy prisoner and his suffering wife. At length, at the end of the week, the messenger returned.

The petition was refused!

The intelligence was communicated to the hapless pair, as they sat together, as usual, in the cell.

"God's will be done!" was the only comment made by Mr. Mostyn.

Constance averted her head; for one instant the same loud sound, as of the rushing of many waters, rang through her ears and brain; sudden darkness, as of a thunder-cloud, whelmed her eyes and heart; her muscles failed her, her breath ceased, her pulses stopped, as once before; then by a mighty effort of the will, she saved herself from swooning, resumed her self-control, and turned a calm gaze of consoling faith

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

upon her husband's countenance. She would not, as yet, trust her voice to speak, but when she did, her words and tones were courageous and inspiring.

But from this day, blow after blow fell upon the devoted heads of the unhappy pair. The next morning's paper announced the day fixed for the execution of Gerald Mostyn. He would willingly have kept the intelligence from his wife, but that Constance learned it from popular gossip. And after fervent prayer for strength, and long struggle, she once more gained the supremacy over sorrow, terror, and despair, and, with a calm and comforting countenance, entered her husband's cell, sat down beside him on the cot, laid her gentle hand upon his shoulder, raised her true eyes to his face, and said—

"Dearest Gerald, I know all—all that you know—and can bear all that you bear. Let there be no more concealments, as there shall be no more partings between us. For mark you, Mr. Mostyn, so long as I live and you live, I will remain with you. Ah, my husband, through all—all! What you can endure I can endure. And to the last moment of your life I will be by your side. My hand shall be the last to clasp your own, my eyes the last to receive your gaze!"

"Constance! Father in Heaven! Constance, have you strength to do this?"

"God helping me, I have and I will do it—*and then die!*" she mentally added.

Calmly, firmly, and even cheerfully, Constance bore up during the day; and at night, no eye save that of the Omniscient witnessed the crushing sorrow that overwhelmed and held her in its serpent folds until the morning, when the necessity of appearing with a serene countenance in the presence of her husband, imparted a sort of miraculous strength of endurance and self-control.

Gerald Mostyn also exercised a marvellous power of self-government. Feeling deeply the dark degradation of his present position and approaching fate—his life of lofty aspiration, persevering effort, and recently-acquired

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

honours, prematurely blighted; his popular favour turned to public execration; his well-won fame to unmerited infamy; his promise of glorious days cut short by shameful death; his sole legacy to his widowed bride a dishonoured name and an incurable sorrow. Ah, heaven, he felt it all. He suffered only as the strong in heart can suffer, and endured only as the great in soul can endure, without a complaint, without a groan, without a sigh that might wound the spirit of another.

His time was passed in preparation for death—in "setting his house in order," and girding himself for his journey through the "valley of the shadow." He made such provision for Constance, until her majority, as his limited means would permit. He wrote letters or received visits from such friends as evil fortune had left him, and he passed many hours of the day and night in reading the Bible, in meditation, and in prayer.

Through all these days his friends were not idle. Renewed application had been made in his behalf for the clemency of the Crown, but made, alas! in vain. No pardon, no reprieve, not a day's respite from death was granted to the unhappy man.

Constance, whose faith in her husband's perfect guiltlessness amounted to knowledge, and who confidently believed that if the opprtunity were given her, she should be able to impress the same faith upon the mind of the Minister, who would then feel constrained to grant the proposition, besought with tears and prayers to be permitted to journey to the capital, and seek an interview with the Home Secretary.

But it was now the dead of winter; the snow lay two feet deep upon the level, and drifted in avalanches along the mountain-passes; the weather was tempestuous, the roads difficult and impracticable, coach and waggon travelling on many routes had stopped; and Mr. Mostyn would in nowise consent that his wife should undertake a journey that he knew would be a useless endangering of her health and life, or seek an

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

interview which he felt in his soul would involve a fruitless sacrifice of her self-respect and dignity.

Meanwhile his life was dwindling to the shortest span.

It was a few days before that appointed for the execution, when an event occurred that revived the dying hope of Constance. Lord Starr arrived at Llyndell on his route north. Constance chanced to receive intelligence on the very evening of the day of the Minister's arrival. She was informed of it after she had left the prison, and was on her way up to her "chamber of desolation," by Mrs. Wardour, who had heard the news from a Llyndell man who had come into town.

Constance's oppressed heart rebounded in her bosom. Now she would have prayed for the opportunity of speaking with the secretary, her old friend and suitor. Surely he would listen to her arguments—surely he would be impressed with her faith and grant her request. She hurried up into her chamber, closed the door, and threw herself on her knees to pray for a blessing upon her purposed undertaking, before she sought repose. Repose! for many weeks misery had murdered sleep; now hope kept her wide awake.

Early in the morning she sought her husband's cell, told him the news, and renewed her request. With impassioned earnestness she implored his permission to seek the Secretary's presence.

"For oh, Mr. Mostyn," she said, "even should the petition be again rejected, and the worst befall, it will be my only earthly comfort to remember that this means of saving you was not left untried."

This last argument was irresistible, and the passionately-desired permission was given.

Constance hastened to make her preparations. The perilous state of the mountain-pass precluded the possibility of travelling by a carriage; but through the good offices of Mr. Wardour, she procured the use of a sure-footed horse for herself, and a mountain pony for William Wardour who was to attend her on her journey. It was but six o'clock in the morning when the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

lady and her young groom set forth. A hard ride of several hours through the wintry woods of the plain brought them to the foot of the ridge, then two hours' slow and toilsome efforts brought them up the steep and rugged ascent, and down the yet more difficult and dangerous declivity of the snow-covered mountain-pass, at the foot of which nestled the old mansion house of Llyndell.

It was with suspended breath and pausing pulse that Constance drew rein at the door of her old home, in which, but one short month before, she had been made a blessed bride, but to which she was now an alien, and at which sojourned the one man who held her husband's —nay, her own life,—in the hollow of his hand!

In this wintry weather there was no servant lingering about the outside of the premises, so her little groom sprang from his pony, took the reins from her hand, led her horse to the block, secured him, and offered his hand to assist her in alighting. With an effort that brought breath back to her laden lungs, and sent the curdling blood circulating through her veins, she leaped lightly from her horse, and, trembling in every limb, went up the steps to the porch—that very porch which had witnessed the betrothal of herself and Gerald.

The window-shutters of the two front rooms on either side of the entrance-door were open, and the ruddy glow of fire-light, through crimson curtains, shone out in comfortable contrast to the snow-clad earth and wintry wind without.

She went to the door, knocked, and was admitted by David, who stared at her with speechless surprise, and then looked frightened at having unwittingly shown her so much courtesy as to open the door.

"Is Lord Starr staying here, David?"

"Yes'm," replied the man, with dying tones and dilated eyes.

Constance tore a leaf from her tablets, and wrote a few lines as follows:

"*Mrs. Gerald Mostyn presents her respectful compliments to Lord Starr, and begs the favour of an interview in the library, where she awaits his lordship.*"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

She placed it in the hands of the boy, saying—

"Show me into the library, and then take this to Lord Starr."

"Yes'm," ejaculated the man, who, though frightened at what he had done and was about to do, was so constrained by her commanding manner, that he instantly obeyed.

Leading the way up-stairs, he opened the door into a well-warmed and well-lighted library—the very library in which, a month before, her happy bridegroom, now, alas! a prisoner under sentence of death, had taken a parting glass of wine with his circle of congratulating friends, just a moment previous to his unexpected arrest.

She seated herself in one of the easy chairs that sat on each side of the round table which stood before the glowing grate. Leaning her elbow on the table and her head upon her hand, she waited in intense anxiety the coming of the Home Secretary.

Ah, Constance was greatly changed within the last few weeks. The firm contour of form and feature, the gentle pride of eye and brow, the graceful *hauteur* of air and carriage were gone now. Her fine face was delicate even to fragility; her pure complexion pale and transparent as pearl in contrast to the rich, dark tresses plainly divided over her noble brow; her large, dark-grey eyes smouldered in deepest gloom beneath their long black lashes, or suddenly flashed forth with the wild and frightened glare of a hunted hart. She wore, perhaps in lack of something plainer, a riding-habit of rich black cloth, with a black hat and feather, and a veil of black Chantilly lace. A delicate white linen collar and cuffs, and dainty black kid gloves, completed her elegant costume. A mournful beauty in her attitude and air lent an irresistible charm to her appearance.

Lord Starr was far too gallant to keep a lady waiting. Perhaps the reader knows that chivalric gallantry is the peculiar *forte* of good-looking single gentlemen of an uncertain age. At all events, in something less than three minutes from the time that David left the library, the door opened and Lord Starr entered—a tall, finely-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

formed, rather stout, very handsome, grave, and dignified gentleman, of about fifty-two, with an erect form, and square, massive face, framed in a profusion of iron-grey hair and whiskers, and with a tone, a glance, and a smile of peculiar fascination, when he pleased to exercise that power.

"Good morning, madam," he said, with his softest voice, and with his most winning smile and courteous bow, as he advanced towards the table on the left of which Constance was seated. The lady arose to receive him, but with a graceful wave of his hand, and a gracious tone, he prayed her to resume her seat, and promised to follow her example.

They sat down—Lord Starr on the right, Constance on the left, the round table between them, the glowing fire before them.

"I trust that you have been well, madam, since I had the honour of meeting you last?" inquired the Secretary, in a bland voice, as he rested his left elbow upon the table, and turned with a smile of grave courtesy towards his companion.

"As well, sir, as my calamitous circumstances will admit," replied the lady, truthfully, but with a choking voice, for it tried her soul to listen to these commonplaces of courtesy now so very much *out* of place.

There was a silence of a few minutes, during which Constance struggled with herself, and strove for words wherewith to open that communication for which the Secretary seemed courteously to wait. Perceiving at length, however, that each moment her embarrassment grew deeper and more distressing, he graciously relieved her, by saying, with a show of great deference—

"You did me the honour, madam, to command my attendance. I am here at your orders. Will you deign, therefore, to inform me in what manner I can be so happy as to serve you?"

"Ah! sir, can you be at a loss to know!" exclaimed Constance, with passionate earnestness.

The secretary turned his head, with an attitude and expression of polite attention, and well-assumed perplexity—he seemed very much at a loss.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Will you do me the honour, madam, to explain in what way I can be so fortunate as to please you?"

"*Please me!* Oh, sir? you can do infinitely more than please me! You can give me back my life and all that makes life of any worth!" exclaimed Constance, clasping her hands, and raising her eyes imploringly to his face.

"Speak, madam! I fear you over-rate my power; but all that a man may do for a lady I freely promise. Command me, madam."

Without another word Constance arose, and with a profound obeisance, laid her petition upon the table before him.

The Secretary raised it, recognized it as the petition that he had seen and rejected before, and, with a well-feigned look of sorrow, gently pushed it aside, saying, with grave courtesy—

"Your commands, as I feared, transcend my powers of compliance, madam."

"Oh! do not say so, sir. Well do I know that this Divine power of life and death is vested for us in your influence with the Crown. Give us life! lift the miserable woman before you from the deepest depths of a sorrow you never dreamed of to the heights of a joy you can never imagine!" prayed Constance, with hands wrung together until their delicate blue veins were started up and knotted like dark cords, and with wild dilated eyes fixed in passionate supplication upon his face.

"You love this bridegroom of yours very much, madam," said the Secretary, with a strange and ominous change in his voice.

"*Love him!*" responded Constance, in a tone deep, low, and vibrating with intense emotion—"*Love him!* Oh, sir! at a less solemn crisis your question might call a blush to my cheek; but not now—not when life or death may hang upon the next words you utter! Yes, *I love him!*—so much that if he should suffer the death to which he is condemned, I also, who have not been tried or convicted, must share his unmerited fate—for I could not survive him!"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"What, madam, would you be a suicide?" exclaimed the Secretary, in a voice of horror.

"No, no; nor would it be necessary, I should not destroy myself, but *die!*"

"Madam—all this while you are standing. I pray you resume your seat."

"No, no, sir! This attitude, or one still more humble, is the proper posture for a supplicant in the presence of the power who holds her life in his hands!"

"Why harp you on this subject, lady? I hold no power over your precious life."

"Over my *husband's*, then; and through his, over mine."

"You mistake, madam. My power is not so unlimited as you imagine," he said. Taking up the petition, glancing over it, and then laying it down, he continued, "the pardoning prerogative, as vested in the Crown, is certainly a discretionary power; but it is, also, a holy trust, and should be exercised only on rare occasions, well understood, and on certain conditions, under no one of which Mr. Mostyn's case comes. He has had a fair trial; he has been convicted under the most crushing weight of both circumstantial evidence and positive testimony, which has left not the shadow of a doubt as to his guilt in the minds of any, except, perhaps, his too confiding bride, and which has left no possible loop-hole for his escape from death. Pardon me, madam, that I speak thus plainly upon a most painful subject. I do so only to justify myself before you."

While he spoke Constance stood with her form half bent towards him, her white hands wrung painfully together, her bloodless lips compressed, and her wild, impassioned eyes strained forth in an agony of entreaty.

"Oh, sir," she began, "there is no need to justify yourself to me. And neither do I petition for a pardon, since no crime has been committed. But for a respite from death I implore you on my knees!" she continued, sinking at his feet, and bowing her head almost to the dust before him.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Madam, arise. The respite for which you pray falls under the same rule as the pardon for which you scorn to petition. I could as consistently advise the one as the other. And if I could, bethink you, dear lady, of what little use such respite would be. It would, indeed, only serve to prolong the agony better got over at once. Dear lady, arise. It wounds me cruelly to see you thus," he said, taking her hand, and gently essaying to lift her to her feet.

"No, no! No, no! Here, on my knees—until you grant my prayer! What use would the respite be, you ask? Every use! Sir, he is guiltless! he is guiltless! God knoweth that he is; and in the additional length of days that might be accorded, God would discover the truth and bring to light his stainless integrity. Oh, sir! procure for him that one remaining chance of life! Think what it is to die for a crime he never committed! To be cut off in the bloom of youth, and glow of love, and glory of fame! To be forced violently from this dear life and warm sunshine, and bright world, full of sweet affections, and aspiring hopes, and to be crowded down into the darksome grave! to him who had just reached the acme of all his toils, and hopes, and aspirations—to be suddenly struck down—down—down to this deep Gehenna of destruction! *Oh, sir, do you realize this?* Lord Starr, hear me! pity me! save me! and I will bless your mercy, and pray for your happiness for ever!" she cried, convulsively, clasping both his hands in both of hers, and straining her wild and terrified eyes up to his face, in the deep anguish of supplication.

"Constance Wynne," he replied, in a solemn tone, "there was a time, not long ago, when, at *your* feet *I* poured forth my soul in prayer for that mercy which you now implore of me for another! Only, Constance, it was not for the boon of life I prayed, but for that blessing which would have made life passing sweet to me!"

Constance! The current of her blood turned back on hearing these words. All that she had ever heard of the fierce, cruel, and relentless spirit that lurked

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

behind his fascinating smile, and suave, stately courtesy, rushed upon her memory, congealing her heart. She raised her eyes in consternation to his face.

There was certainly nothing in that countenance to terrify or discourage. It was, as I have before described it to be—a fine one; and now far more benignant in promise than any of his words had been. Constance cast her fate upon the countenance, and answered with grave sweetness—

"Remember those things no longer, sir, or, remember them only in mercy; and if ever you have esteemed poor Constance Wynne, be magnanimous to Constance Mostyn."

"I will endeavour to be *just*, at least, Constance, a respite would do Mr. Mostyn no good; it would but indefinitely prolong his imprisonment with the faint 'hope deferred that maketh the heart sick.'" He paused, and gazed down upon his supplicant, who remained with her hands clasped, and her eyes fixed upon him with the same expression of wild entreaty.

"Constance," he said, "there is one condition upon which I will interfere to save Gerald Mostyn's life, so that he shall go forth from the prison a free man."

The blood rushed in torrents to her brow, and, retreating, left her even paler than before. Her eyes were more wildly dilated; she looked and felt like one suddenly stricken with madness.

"What is it you say?" she inquired, in a voice sunken with intense anxiety and perplexity. "Oh, did I hear aright? you will save his life?"

"His LIFE will I save upon a certain condition."

Constance sprang to her feet, as an overwhelming tide of joy rushed over her.

"His life! his life! A respite I know you could procure; but his life! his life! Oh, God! my God! I thank thee, for this is more than I could have hoped for, or would have dared to pray for. I am not *insane*, or *dreaming*, am I sir?" she asked, turning a distressed, appealing gaze upon the Home Secretary.

"No, madam. You have heard aright. I will save

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Mr. Mostyn's life upon certain conditions with which you can comply."

"Command me, then. What would I not do or suffer to save my husband! My whole fortune, my life, if necessary, would I give to purchase his salvation!" exclaimed Constance, with eager earnestness.

"Be seated, dear lady, while I speak of the terms upon which I will do as I have promised," said the Secretary, as, with grave courtesy, he handed his companion to a chair, and drew his own to her side.

"And now—the conditions," said Constance.

Lord Starr arose, and with his graceful, gliding step, passed to the door, opened it, looked out, and apparently satisfied that the coast was clear, re-closed it, and returned, and resumed his seat opposite Constance.

He drew his chair forward, so that when he rested his elbow on the table, and leaned his head upon his hand, his face was somewhat too familiarly close to that of the lady. "This is understood to be a confidential interview, madam?"

"Since you desire—yes, my lord," said Constance, with dignity, "only inform me in what manner you can save my husband."

"Nay, madam, that is only to be imparted upon conditions. I have also to ask of you a promise, that all which passes between us, in this interview, shall, in any event, be kept private."

Constance paused a moment to reflect, and then answered directly, but still with dignity—

"Your lordship has my promise."

He drew his chair closer, and dropped his voice to a whisper in addressing her.

"Constance Wynne, I love you," began the Minister, in a hesitating voice.

But Constance sprang to her feet—the indignant blood in torrents crimsoning her face, neck, and bosom, fire flashing from her eyes, anger convulsing her frame. She could not speak, but stood for an instant pressing both hands hard upon her heart to keep down its rising passion. Then growing very pale, she suddenly turned, and walked towards the door.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Lord Starr started up to delay her.

"Madam—Constance, do not leave me thus! hear me explain."

But as if scorning to hold an instant of further conversation with one so base, the lady walked on.

"Constance—madam, you must really hear me," persisted Lord Starr, following her, and seizing her hand.

But scorning to struggle, to reply, or even to listen, she just put forth her other hand, took the bell-rope, and rang a peal that presently brought David into the room.

"Attend me to the door," commanded Constance to this functionary, who immediately obeyed her.

With the air of an outraged empress, the lady passed through the room, leaving Lord Starr standing there, the picture of discomfiture.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE EXECUTION.

CONSTANCE left the house without meeting any one among her relations, who, perhaps, purposely kept out of her way. She remounted her horse, and, attended by her faithful little escort, took her way across the mountain, through the woods, and over the plains to Gwyn.

It was sunset when she reached the town.

Leaving her horse in charge of Willie Wardour, she entered the prison, and proceeded at once to the cell of her husband.

He was seated at his little stand deeply engaged in the perusal of the Scriptures. When she appeared, he looked up, arose, and held out his arms.

She approached and sank into them. He asked no question; she volunteered no information. It was a silent embrace. Then he released her, and they both sat down upon the side of the bed, holding each other's hands. At last— "It is all over," she said.

"I know it, dearest Constance, dearest wife, I know

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

it; I knew it before you went; I consented only to satisfy you."

"Well, I am satisfied. Otherwise, had I not made this effort, I should have been discontented. Now I know that every human means we have used to save ourselves has failed. Therefore it is the will of God that we go hence. We must be resigned! Resigned? I do not know that that is the word; perhaps it should be grateful; for, a little sooner than we expected, we change the scene. If unmerited shame rests upon our early grave on the earth, what care we? Our life is in another sphere. It cannot hurt us that men point to our humble grave and say, 'There lie the convict and his wife;' for we shall be beyond all care for that."

"Dearest Constance! my own dearest Constance! why do you continue to say 'we,' 'our,' 'us,' in speaking of my doomed lot, as if your fate were joined to mine so that you must suffer all that I suffer? Sweet wife, it is not so! One sacrifice will content relentless destiny. After I shall be at rest, a long life of duty and happiness will remain for you. Think of me only as the cloud that obscured your morning of life, but passed away long ere noon, leaving all the sunny day bright to its setting," he said, looking down upon her face with a smile full of benignant love.

She arose and threw herself into his arms, cast hers about his shoulders, and strained him to her faithful bosom, and amid the most fervent caresses, murmured—

"A long life will remain to *both!* to *both!* but it will be a life *beyond the grave!* Oh! I am thine own! own! own! Nothing—not death itself—can sever us! God will not leave me when he takes thee! He is too good! He will not curse me so! There is no reason why I should be left. I have, beside thee, no close tie on earth—none! No one will be bereaved by my departure—no, not one! Therefore, there is no reason why I should not accompany thee on thy journey to the other world, and I feel that the Lord will let me go. We shall begin our married life in that other world, dearest! and I am content! I am happy, since we go together!"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Extremes meet. Sorrow sometimes sublimes to rapture. But it is only the utmost stretch of grief that so reaches ecstacy. And thus it was with Constance now. But it is an overstrain of nature that cannot last long; either the mind flies off in frenzy and confirmed mania, or there is a sudden collapse and fall into despair and idiocy, or else death steps in and closes the scene.

It could not last long with Constance. It was obvious to the most superficial observer, that without the intervention of an especial Providence, it would be as she had said, she would die with her husband!

He laid her head upon his breast, and soothed her excited mind. He asked her no questions relative to her interview with the minister; he knew that it was fruitless, and he felt that it must also have been painful, and refrained from troubling her to recur to the details.

And Constance forebore to distress him with any hint of that conversation. Nothing more was said on the topic of reprieve, nor was the subject recurred to between them again.

The next day, the newspaper, the *Weekly Beacon*, contained the following paragraph:—

"THE APPROACHING EXECUTION.—*We understand that yesterday afternoon a final appeal for pardon was made by the wife of Gerald Mostyn to Lord Starr, at Llyndell, where his lordship is on a visit of a few days. This last petition having been rejected, the unhappy prisoner will suffer the extreme penalty of the law.*"

Constance only saw the caption of that paragraph and, shuddering, turned her eyes away. But Mr. Mostyn read it through, and with a melancholy smile, laid the paper on one side. The remainder of the week was passed by the hapless pair in preparation for the great change that awaited them.

A calmness that looked like fortitude, but was only despair, had settled upon Constance. "Pale and still and silently," she walked at morn from her lodgings to the prison, and at evening from the prison to her lodgings. Scarcely an atom of food passed her lips by day, scarcely an instant's sleep visited her eyes at night.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Only in the presence of her husband was she calm, tender, and devoted.

Gerald Mostyn passed his few remaining hours of life in reading the Scriptures, in prayer, and in converse with his beloved wife. His fortitude never for an instant forsook him, save when he looked at Constance, saw how much she suffered, and how much for his sake she suppressed! And he was almost tempted to wish that it might be even as she said—that she might be permitted to die with him rather than suffered to live a long life of incurable despair. He prayed with her and for her. And thus in sorrow, but in mutual support, the hours passed that brought the night before the execution—his last night of life!

The last night of Gerald Mostyn's allotted life! His few short years of youth were spent and gone; his days were fled; his future contained only hours, and they were numbered; for before the noon of another day it was appointed for him to die. No power on earth save one could redeem him from the grave, and that one had utterly refused to interfere. He must, therefore, surely die; his brief and fitful dream of life was over!

It was now six o'clock, the usual hour at which Constance was accustomed to take leave of him for the night.

The hapless couple sat together on the side of the bed. Before them stood the little stand, upon which was a lighted lamp and an open Bible, a chapter of which they had just finished reading. Each had stifled the mighty anguish of the breast, and had struggled to comfort and sustain the other. They were now silent; and the awful shadow of death seemed lowering over the heads of both.

Through imprisonment, sorrow, and anxiety, Mr. Mostyn had become emaciated in feature, and cadaverous in complexion; but in the expression of his countenance, in his words and manners, he still evinced unshaken firmness.

Grief, care, and vigilance had so blanched and sharpened the face of Constance, that her large gray

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

eyes, and her broad expanse of brow, crowned with its "aureole of ebon locks," seemed preternaturally developed. Yet she, too, though secretly dying of sorrow, exhibited a matchless patience and serenity.

But it was now, as I said, six o'clock, the usual hour of closing. Good Mr. Wardour tapped at the cell door, and upon the response of Mr. Mostyn bidding him come in, he unlocked the door, and entered

"You are about to shut up for the night?" inquired the prisoner.

"Yes," replied the warden, in a broken voice, for he sympathized deeply and painfully with the hapless pair.

"Constance, dearest Constance, bid me good night and leave me now," said Mr. Mostyn, gently drawing his bride to his bosom for a parting embrace.

"I will never leave thee more," responded the lady, in a low, deep voice.

"But, sweet wife, reflect!"

"I have reflected. And for the few short hours we have to live, I will remain by thy side."

"My own dearest! take some pity on yourself. Do not so fearfully try your strength," he entreated, gazing on her tortured but resolute countenance.

"I have strength to suffer all, save separation from thee in thy time of trial; strength to do all save desert thee in thy hour of bitterest need; strength to bear all that may be required of me!" she replied. And then turning to the jailer, she added—

"Mr. Wardour, I shall not leave my husband's cell to-night."

The jailer bowed in silence; he was sure that he was not doing right in permitting this infringement of custom; but he could not find it in his heart to refuse this last comfort to the unhappy lady.

It was usual to leave a turnkey in the cell of the condemned to guard his person through the night preceding his execution; but this also the kind-hearted jailer took upon himself to modify. When about to withdraw from the cell, he said—

"Mr. Mostyn, Tom Turner will lie on a mattress

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

outside the door; so that if you should need anything in the night, or early in the morning, you have only to rap and he will attend you."

"I thank you very much, Mr. Wardour," replied the prisoner, who perfectly understood this change of the usual custom, and accordingly appreciated the kindness. "I thank you very much; and while I have the opportunity, permit me to express my acknowledgments for all the kind attention you have shown me since I have been your——"

"Guest," interrupted the jailer, who never could endure to hear the word "prisoner" spoken. "Well, sir, it is my desire, as well as my interest, to make all my guests as comfortable as circumstances will permit. Good-night, sir. God comfort you, madam." And so saying, the good-hearted man withdrew from the cell.

"I'm done for, Tom Turner, if any mishap comes of this here," said the tender-hearted jailer, as he rejoined his turnkey. "I may lose my place for what I know, but I couldn't help it; I couldn't refuse that sweet, suffering lady anything as I could indulge her in. Lor, Tom Turner, there shouldn't nobody be hung if *I* was the monarch."

"No more there shouldn't, sir, if I was the Minister," said the turnkey.

"Tom Turner!"

"Yes, sir."

"I don't think as I can stand this here much longer."

"No more don't I, sir."

"We was a deal happier when we kept the public, and entertained merry travellers instead of sad prisoners."

"And I served out cakes and ale instead of bread and broth."

"Tom Turner!"

"Yes, sir."

"If I lose my place, we'll keep a public again, and you shall be head waiter."

"Thank'ee, sir."

"Tom!"

"Sir!"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"I'm blamed if I care if I *do* lose the place."

"No more do I, sir."

"There's nothing like a merry heart, and that is what I haven't had since I have been warden of Gwyn jail."

"No more have I sir," said Tom Turner, and the two kind-hearted creatures left the lobby.

Meanwhile, left alone with Constance in his cell, Gerald trimmed his lamp and resumed the reading of the Scriptures. He read in a low and modulated voice, to reach only the ear of his wife, the seven penitential Psalms of David, and then the last seven chapters of the Gospel of St. John, containing the most eloquent account of the last scenes of our Saviour's mortal life. After which they knelt and prayed together—prayed fervently for resignation to the will of Heaven; for grace to forgive their destroyers, even as He the Sinless One had forgiven his enemies; and lastly, for strength to go through the awful trial that awaited them upon the morrow.

These devotions occupied the whole evening until ten o'clock. Then, calmed, strengthened, and refreshed, they prepared for rest. Neither expected to sleep; but each sought repose only in the hope of bringing it to the other.

The eyes of Constance never closed in sleep for one single instant, but lest her wakefulness should keep him from slumber, she remained perfectly still.

Gerald, believing her to be asleep, thanked God for the blessing, and fearing to stir lest he should awaken her, gave himself up to such meditations as he deemed appropriate to his condition. In the midst of these, sleep, like a *benedicite*, fell softly on his soul. Constance knew by his regular breathing that this was so. And she folded her hands together and prayed for him —and for herself so far as that she might be permitted to die when he should die. While thus praying, the angel of sleep pressed down her eyelids also, and she, too, slept.

It is passing sweet so to sleep, and to forget our sorrows; but oh! it is terrible after such a sleep, and such a forgetting, to awake to all the awful realities of

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

fate! Memory then returns with the tremendous shock of a first calamity.

Constance sleeps and dreams a sweet dream of love and glory.

In her dream she is a happy bride, by her husband's side. Their earthly ambition is crowned with the highest success.

He moves, and fame follows his footsteps, and she basks in his reflected light. They stand within a vast and crowded hall; he speaks, and admiring multitudes hang upon his inspired and inspiring words. The scene changes; He stands within a magnificent hall, sumptuous with velvet hangings, splendid with reflected light, crowded with an innumerable company. He is greeted with shouts of applause by the vast assembly that fills to suffocation the great hall; by the crowds that choke up the galleries, stairs, lobbies, and anterooms leading to it; thunders of applause rend the very sky! In the intensity of her delight and triumph for him, Constance awakes——

"Oh, God! Oh, God! The narrow walls of the prison cell enclose her! There, on the poor cot, lies the worshipped of her glorious dream, prostrate, emaciated, bloodless—and soon, oh, Heaven of Heavens, to die!

CHAPTER XXIV.

A RESPITE AT THE LAST MOMENT.

THE shouts she had heard in her dream were the voices of a rude crowd in the street below the prison, who were cursing, swearing, and elbowing each other, as they hurried tumultuously onward to secure good standing-places on Gallows-hill, outside the town, where the execution was to take place. Constance saw and heard them as she turned and looked through the grated window that was close beside her pillow and that overlooked the street below; and, totally bereft of courage by her bright, delusive dream and its terrible

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

contrast, she cowered down, groaning, shuddering, and writhing in extremity of anguish.

"My Constance! my beloved one! take courage!"

It was his voice that spoke! his voice! it recalled her to a sense of duty! With one of those mighty efforts in which years of vitality are in a moment consumed, she controlled her agony, composed herself, and arose.

"It was the dream that did it; but fear nothing for me, dearest; I am myself, and shall not fail again!" she said, sweetly, yielding her lips to his kiss as serenely as if she had only arisen to superintend their house and sit at the head of their table.

"Oh, these dreams! They are but dreams 'within a dream.'" For what says the poet—

> "Our life is but a sleep and a forgetting;
> The soul that rises in us, our life's star,
> Hath had elsewhere its setting,
> And cometh from afar."

"Sweet Constance! our dream of life is almost over! Is it so hard, dear love, to wake?"

"No, no, not when we wake together," she murmured.

They soon knelt and offered up their morning orisons. It was well: they received new strength from this, for as they arose beside the cot, the little grated window was before them, and through its bars they saw the eastern horizon all blazing with the glorious light of the rising sun, and the snow-clad hills all crimsoned with the ruddy reflection; but oh, God of mercies! there, on the highest hill—there, strongly marked against the white background of the snow and the crimson glow of the sky—reared the ghastly gallows! A motley crowd surrounded the scaffold; other crowds in different groups, by different paths, were climbing the hill.

With a terrible shudder, Constance turned away her head and covered her eyes.

Calmly Gerald Mostyn drew the little curtain across the grating, to shut from her eyes the view.

The turnkey soon tapped at the cell door, entered and supplied them with the simple necessaries for their

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

prison toilet. Then the warden came with the slight breakfast, which, with the exception of the coffee, was sent untasted away.

The brief winter morning was already far spent; the execution was appointed to take place between the hours of nine and twelve. It was now half-past nine. As the humble breakfast-service was removed, Mr. Osborne entered the cell. In speechless sorrow he pressed the hands of Gerald and Constance. And when he had recovered his composure, he entered into conversation with them, and finding both calm and firm, he proposed prayer. Ah, prayer! greatest comfort and support in the heaviest afflictions! Often had they resorted to the fountain of strength and consolation, and never had they come unblessed away. Again, led by the minister of God, they prayed, and again were they blessed.

Ten o'clock! As they arose from their kneeling posture there was a sound of a carriage drawn up before the prison gate. Mr. Osborne shivered, for well he knew the import of that slight noise. Next there was heard the coming of several feet along the lobby, and a pausing at the cell door, followed almost instantly by the opening of the door, and the entrance of the sheriff alone.

All knew his errand. He was clothed in his official suit, and the solemnity of his countenance did not belie his sombre costume. He looked much disturbed on seeing the lady still in the cell; but recovered himself, bowed, and inquired of Mr. Mostyn whether he had slept well, and how he found himself this morning.

Mr. Mostyn answered that he had rested through the night, and was prepared this morning to meet his fate.

Again the sheriff bowed, looked with a troubled expression of countenance at Constance, and touching the elbow of the clergyman, drew him aside and whispered—

"Why is it that Mrs. Mostyn is still suffered by her friends to linger here. She should have been taken away before this. Pray see to it that she goes now."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"What? Has their parting come so soon? When do we leave the prison for the place of execution?" asked the minister, in distress.

"Within half an hour, and there are preliminaries to be arranged in the cell which she should not be permitted to witness. I will retire for fifteen minutes; you may leave them alone for that length of time if they desire it, but at the end of fifteen minutes you will please to take her away."

"I will endeavour to do so," said the sorrowful minister.

"You can leave her in a place of safety, and then return in time, as I suppose you are to attend Mr. Mostyn on the scaffold?"

"Yes," said the almost broken-hearted clergyman.

"I have brought a carriage to take him to execution. Yourself and Mr. Mostyn will occupy the back seat; I will sit in front. I leave you now to your task," concluded the sheriff, and with a grave nod, he retired from the cell.

Mr. Osborne, in sorrow, drew near the prisoner and whispered—

"My dear friend, I am about to leave you alone with your wife for fifteen minutes. Say all that you have to say to her in that time, for at its conclusion you will give her to my care, and yield yourself with, I trust, a martyr's heroism, to suffer the will of heaven."

"I thank you," answered Gerald Mostyn. And the minister left the cell.

"Come hither, dear Constance," he said, as the clergyman closed the door.

Constance drew nearer, sat down beside him on the cot, and yielded her slight form to his encircling arm.

"Sweet wife! you will not try to keep your strange resolution; you cannot go through with it, Constance; you will abandon it, my darling; you will suffer me now to bless you and bid you adieu, and leave you in the charge of Mr. Osborne, who will take you to his wife, your friend! Say, sweet Constance, will you not consent to this?"

"Oh, ask me not to leave you while you live!

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Indeed, I cannot do it! And fear no more weakness from me! I am past all human suffering now! I go to strengthen and sustain you, not to embarrass you! You will see!"

In vain were all his arguments and persuasions, given only for her sake. She knew that they were only for that and she resisted them. And in his heart he thanked her for her heroism, and received comfort from her fidelity.

"Well, well, sweet Constance, it shall be even as you say! You shall be with me to the last! Your hand shall receive my latest clasp, and your eyes my latest glance; for I feel that you are heroic and devoted, and that God will sustain you or take you!" he said, and strained her to his bosom in a fervent embrace.

The fifteen minutes of grace had now elapsed, and the clergyman had re-entered the cell, to take leave of his friend and remove Constance.

"She will not leave me!" said Mr. Mostyn. "My wife will attend me to my death."

The clergyman started in surprise and distress.

"Oh! this must not be," he said.

"It is useless to expostulate! she will not depart from me!"

"But, my dear Gerald! my poor Constance! you know not what you do!"

"It is useless! you can say nothing that I have not already said, and said in vain! She will not leave me!"

While they were talking thus, the sheriff re-entered the cell. Seeing Constance still lingering there, he frowned with perplexity, and exclaimed to the clergyman—

"What! not gone yet?"

"No, alas! she refuses to be separated from her husband," replied Mr. Osborne.

"That is most embarrassing! that is exceedingly distressing! for you know in that case, what will have to be done? She must be forced from the cell. What a scene that will make. How excessively painful!

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

What shall we do?" exclaimed the sheriff, in consternation.

Constance, without ever hearing, guessed the purport of their conversation. Calmly she arose and confronted the sheriff, saying, quietly—

"Look in my face, Mr. Harrison. Do you see any sign of weakness or of failing here? Oh, sir! with me and for him the bitterness of death is past! Sir, I have suffered everything that can be suffered in daily and nightly contemplating the consummation of this very day! Daily and nightly has the scaffold been present to my agonized vision, until at last I have grown accustomed to its horrors; it has this hour no terrors for me! I do not dread to attend my husband thither."

"Madam! but this is horrible! most horrible! that you should think of being present at such a scene!" exclaimed the sorely troubled officer.

"And why, Mr. Harrison? If my dear husband were dying, should I not be permitted to sit by his side and hold his hand or bathe his brow! Sir! he is dying now, since his very minutes are numbered. I pray for the privilege of remaining with him to the last.'

"But, good lady, this cannot be permitted," expostulated the sheriff.

"Unfortunately for your declaration, sir, you have no power to prevent it. You may indeed debar me from the privilege of ascending the platform with him, but you cannot hinder me from standing with the many hundred others that are assembled at the foot of the scaffold," said Constance, firmly.

"The Lord is my witness, lady, that I would not debar you from one privilege that I could grant."

"Then let me attend my husband to the place of death. And do not fear that my courage will fail, or that I will give you any trouble, or hinder you in the least, from the discharge of your duties. Again look in my eyes! Do you see failure or faltering there? Humanly speaking, my heart is broken, sir! nothing more can hurt it, and the certain knowledge

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

that I shall not survive my husband one hour, gives me the strange courage at which I see you wonder."

"In Heaven's name, madam, be it as you will! You have conquered me," answered the sheriff, in deep emotion. Then going to Gerald Mostyn, he said—

"We must set out almost immediately. Is there anything you wish to attend to before we set forward?"

"Nothing," said the prisoner.

At a signal of the clergyman all knelt, and for the last time offered up a short and fervent prayer. As soon as they arose, Constance tied on her little bonnet, Gerald drew her arm within his own, and, preceded by the sheriff and the clergyman, and followed by the warden and turnkey, they left the cell and went below, where, before the prison, the fatal carriage waited. Two mounted constables attended the equipage.

The sheriff held the door open: Mr. Mostyn handed Constance in, and entered after her. They two occupied the back seat. The sheriff and the clergyman followed them, and took the front seat, and the order was given to drive on. As the carriage passed the prison gate into the street, a great shout from the rabble without greeted it. But the constable on the coach-box beside the coachman gave the order to drive rapidly, and they were whirled along the street, followed by the hoots and cries of the crowd.

A half an hour's rapid drive over the plains outside the town, brought them to the foot of the hill upon which the scaffold had been erected. Here, as they slowly climbed the ascent, the constables had to ride before to keep off the rabble, who, anxious to get a sight at the prisoner, thronged the road. As they neared the top of the hill, they found the crowd denser.

It was with difficulty, and in the face of brutal resistance, obscene abuse and blasphemous oaths, that the constables forced a way for the carriage to pass to the foot of the scaffold. Here they entered a hollow square, formed by a company of the county militia, whose bayonets glittered in the morning sun around the scaffold.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

The carriage drew up near the foot of the scaffold. The sheriff got out and handed out his prisoner, and arm in arm they stood waiting.

The minister then got out, and assisted Constance to alight, and drawing her arm in his, joined the sheriff and the prisoner.

They all waited only for Gerald Mostyn to take leave of his wife. She came to his side with a face blanched whiter than his own. Her hand was clasped in his, and her eyes lifted in holy love and faith to his face. Yet no one could look upon her marble brow and burning eyes as they were raised to his, and not feel that her life hung upon his life, and that the snapping of his thread of existence would also sever her own!

"Come, my own Constance," he said, "show yourself a Christian woman in this trial. Here—give me both your hands! look into my eyes!"

She gave him both her hands, and gazed with deathless love into his eyes.

"This is *not* the last clasp! this is *not* the last glance! We shall meet again in a very few minutes! Wait for me, love, in the heavens above, for I shall not be an hour behind you," she said.

"Dearest, you give me strength to die! God bless you," he replied, pressing a parting kiss upon her lips, and beckoning to Mr. Osborne to come and receive her from his arms.

Constance returned her husband's last kiss and benediction, and yielded herself to the charge of the minister, who, placing one arm around her waist to support her failing form, put her in the carriage.

The sheriff drew the prisoner's arm within his own, and led him up the steps to the scaffold.

When Gerald Mostyn appeared upon the platform, high above the heads and in full view of the vast concourse of people assembled around the scaffold, a terrible shout greeted him. But when the next moment Mr. Osborne, the clergyman, stepped upon the platform, and stood beside the condemned, a dead silence of awe fell upon the turbulent human sea, and there was a great calm! Two deputies to attend the sheriff followed the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

pastor. In the centre, upon the fatal trap, stood Gerald Mostyn, whose pale face formed a ghastly contrast to the simple black dress he wore; on his right stood the minister of God, with an open prayer-book in his hand. Behind him stood the sheriff's officers.

So absorbed were they in the momentous scene in which they were the actors, that they were totally unconscious of the tumult that was beginning to agitate the vast multitude around the scaffold.

The minister opened the book, and amid a death-like silence, commenced reading the solemn service for the dead. The ritual occupied some fifteen minutes, and when it was over, and the minister's voice had ceased, you might have heard a pin fall, so perfect was the stillness. The supreme moment—the moment of the execution—had arrived. At a signal from the sheriff, the clergyman pressed the hand of the prisoner, and withdrew from his side. One bailiff produced the cap—the other the cord! The sheriff advanced his foot near the spring.

And Gerald Mostyn was standing upon the fatal drop! At a signal from the sheriff his two assistants advanced to perform their terrible office. But before the first could slip the cap over the face of the condemned, the tumult that had been rising for the last two minutes, now broke into a deafening shout, and—

"Hold! hold! A respite! a respite!" was thundered to the sky. The vast sea of heads swayed violently to and fro, like the waves of the ocean lashed by a storm, or the multitudinous leaves of the forest driven by the wind.

"A reprieve! a reprieve!" again rose in thunder from the ground.

And as the crowd swayed and parted right and left, a horseman, bearing a white flag, with his steed covered with foam, and his dress stained with travel, galloped furiously onward, and threw himself from his saddle at the foot of the scaffold. The steed tottered and fell from exhaustion. But the rider, giving no thought to this, sprang up the ladder, bounded upon the platform, and thrust a sealed paper into the hands of the sheriff.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

That officer tore open the packet, ran his eyes hurriedly over its contents, and then, turning to the amazed prisoner, held out his hand, and said—

"Mr. Mostyn, allow me to congratulate you! The Home Secretary has relented. His lordship has procured you a respite."

"My God, I thank thee!" were Gerald Mostyn's first words. His next thought was of his wife—'Constance! oh, Constance!' he cried, stretching his arms towards the carriage where she lay insensible in the arms of the minister.

But Constance had fainted. She had been prepared for death, but not for life; and the sudden joy of the respite had overwhelmed her, and she lay in a deep swoon.

But joy never kills. Constance was soon recovered, and took her seat beside her husband on their way back to town.

CHAPTER XXV.

A SECRET OF THE CONFESSIONAL.

WE must go back for a little to relate the circumstances that led to the change in his lordship's intentions, and to the consequent act of clemency which had given Gerald Mostyn again to life.

On the Saturday evening preceding, old priest Maraudey occupied the confessional of Saint Andrew's, at Crucis. The shades of evening were gathering fast; the dim church was faintly lighted by the two wax tapers that burned before the great altar, and fell here and there upon the carved image of angel, saint, or martyr, that filled the niches near; the old priest, hopeless of another penitent that night, was about to rise and leave the church, when the sound of a hasty and faltering footstep near caused him to pause and resume his seat.

And the next moment the curtain was put aside,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

and a man entered, and dropped rather than kneeled at the feet of the confessor. At first he did not speak, but the sound of his labouring lungs and palpitating heart was audible through the stillness of the church. He panted like a hunted beast at bay, or a fugitive fallen exhausted in a flight for life. His face was blanched to a chalky whiteness, and sharpened till each feature gleamed out with piercing distinctness; his brows were knit, *writhen* together; the corners of his mouth drawn down, and his white lips apart and stiff as if by extreme agony; great drops of sweat stood upon his corrugated brow; his hands were wrung together, until the finger-joints shone out like horns; his whole form shuddered, cowered, grovelled at the feet of the priest. "Have mercy on me, father, for I have awfully sinned," he gasped, in an almost unintelligible voice.

"God's mercy upon thee, my son; all sin is awful," replied the priest, in an agitated voice; for, much as he had been accustomed to hearing the secret crimes and sorrows of others, the manner of this man deeply alarmed and troubled him.

"Pity me, father, for my sin is past pardon," prayed the penitent, wringing his pale hands.

"I pity thee from my soul, my son; but there is no sin beyond the grace of God!"

"Except *my* sin! Oh, father, except *my* sin!"

"My son, *despair* is one of the greatest sins. God is merciful; unburden your bosom to His minister; repent and be absolved."

"Oh, God—my God!" groaned the man, in the last degree of anguish.

"Nay, my son, the more grievous it may be to thee to confess thy sin, the more merit shalt thou have in doing this duty. Unbosom thyself to thy spiritual father," said the priest, encouragingly.

"I came here for that purpose, and yet I cannot. Oh, God, I cannot. Father, your blood would curdle at the tale. My sin is one of the deepest die!"

"'Though thy sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool!'" said the priest, gently.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"And mine," broke forth the wretched man, in an agony of remorse, "mine are red like crimson, for my hand is crimsoned—is crimsoned with the crime for which another must suffer in the morning!"

"Oh, my son—my unhappy son! what is that which you tell me?" exclaimed the priest in horror.

"I tell you that which God and Satan and I and *you* now know to be true! My hand, and my hand only, is red with the blood of him for whose murder Gerald Mostyn must innocently suffer to-morrow!"

"My son—my son, you are mad!"

"Would to heaven I were!"

Then there fell a sudden silence of awe between them, which was broken at last by the troubled voice of the priest.

"My son, can it be that you are sane, and that you speak the truth?"

"I speak the truth! God knoweth whether I am sane, or if so, how long I may continue sane. *I did the deed!*"

"Oh, my son—my son! what tempted you to this crime?"

"Avarice tempted me! Avarice *crazed* me; The old man was aged and miserly. His life and his hoarded gold were alike useless to all. I slew him for his gold! Remorse soon seized upon my soul, but I soothed the gnawing pain by repeating to myself that the victim was old and wicked, and his taking off hurt no one—not even himself. But now a young man, full of life, vigour, and hope, blessed with love and wealth, and well-earned fame, is dishonoured, and about to die for my deed! Thus crime grows out of crime, and the weight of sin is pressing my soul down to perdition. Oh, father, for the love of Christ, tell me what shall I do!"

The priest did not immediately answer, but bowed his head, and reflected for a few moments, then looking up, he inquired, solemnly—

"Do you demand my counsel in full sincerity of purpose to follow it?" "I do."

"My son, that which I counsel you to do is the only

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

one right thing to do. It is painful, grievous, intolerable, I know, but it is the sole course left to you. My son, you should go instantly to the town, confess your sins, clear the innocent, and give yourself up to the authorities. It is a terrible trial, I know, but it is the only restitution you can make, and God will give you strength to make it."

Nothing but deep groans from the wretched man answered this. The priest prayed in silence for his penitent.

"Father," at length cried the man, "I repent in sorrow and bitterness of spirit. Father will you not absolve me of my sin?"

"Son, I can absolve you only on the condition I have named."

"And they, father, are——"

"That you shall go and deliver yourself up, and save the innocent from unmerited punishment."

"But, oh! oh! in that case I should have to die. And I cannot die, father—I am not fit to die! I am not old, as Hugh Horne was, not prepared for death, as Gerald Mostyn is. Father, I dare not die! I cannot give myself up?" exclaimed the unhappy man.

"Then the church cannot give you absolution," solemnly replied the priest.

"But I repent—I *repent*—I REPENT!" wailed the wretch, wringing his hands, and grovelling upon the floor at the feet of his confessor.

"There can be no true repentance, my son, where there exists the power without the will of making restitution."

"But I have the will—I *have* the will—I HAVE the will!" vehemently exclaimed the penitent. "I have the will, but not the power. I would gladly save Mostyn; but I cannot do so without sacrificing myself, and I am not prepared to die, my father!"

"Then, miserable man, if you do not intend to make restitution, so far as in you lies, will you tell me why you present yourself before me to-night?"

"Why," cried the sufferer; "why does the overburdened breast seek relief?—why do the drowning

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

catch at straws?—why, in the deepest despair, do we still hope? I came to confide to you, under the sacred seal of confession, the secret sin of my soul! I came in the fond, mad hope—the hope born of despair—the hope that you, in your superior wisdom and goodness, might devise a plan by which I could serve him without sacrificing myself. I came in the hope that the bitter, bitter remorse that I suffer—the remorse that chases sleep from my bed, and appetite from my board—might win you to absolve me of my grievous sin! Oh, father, I repent! *I repent! I repent!*"

"Alas! my son, the church has no absolution for those who refuse to make restitution. Let me persuade you to do that great act of justice, and experience the church's mercy!"

"Oh, I cannot, father? I cannot! I dare not meet the consequences!"

"Then, I dare not give you absolution! Reflect, my son, that if, before to-morrow, you have not denounced yourself to the authorities, Gerald Mostyn will have perished on the scaffold for *your* crime, and you will have taken upon your own soul the burden of an unsupportable sin."

"Father, you cannot give me absolution except I give myself up?"

"No."

"And this is your ultimatum, father?"

"This is my ultimatum."

"God help me, then!" cried the penitent, starting to his feet, and rushing from the confessional.

In a moment he was back again, asking, hurriedly—

"Father, you recognized me?"

"I recognized you, my son," replied the priest.

"And you know who I am?"

"I well know who you are."

"Father!" exclaimed the man, in alarm, "you have refused me absolution, unless I make a public acknowledgment of my crime, and give myself up to die in the stead of the innocent condemned man; how know I but that you may go still further, and denounce me to the authorities?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Your story, my son, was confided to me under the seal of confession—the sacred seal that may never be broken!"

"And my secret is safe with you?"

"As safe, alas! as with the dead!"

"Even though Gerald Mostyn should innocently perish to-morrow, for the lack of the secret being divulged?"

"Alas, yes! Even to save an innocent man from dying the death of the guilty, I may not break a solemn oath! But, my son, I charge you, as you value your soul's immortal weal, yourself to give that secret to the winds!"

"It is enough, father! I go!"

"To divulge your crime and clear the innocent, I hope, my son!"

"No, but to wrestle with remorse, despair, anguish!" cried the miserable man, starting up and hurrying from the scene.

The priest remained almost transfixed with horror and amazement at the tale that he had heard. His own position in the affair was one of the most painful that could be imagined; knowing that Gerald Mostyn was perfectly innocent of the crime for which he was to die on the morrow; knowing the guilty party in whose stead he was to perish; but having this knowledge only under the sacred seal of confession, and being bound by his priestly oath, under heaviest penalties, never, under any circumstances, or in any extremity, to divulge any secret so confided. In truth, this was a most distressing position to the old priest.

Instead of leaving the church, as he had intended to do, he remained sitting in the confessional, alternately praying and meditating as to what he could possibly do to serve the innocent without breaking the seal of the confessional. At length he thought of a plan, dangerous but promising. What was intended needed to be quickly done, for it was now eight o'clock in the evening, and unless the execution was stayed before the noon of the next day, the guiltless must die for the guilty.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Rising and putting his little square hat on his head, the good priest hurried, as fast as his heavy weight would permit, from the church.

That night Lord Starr was seated at the supper table, at Llyndell, in company with Colonel North and the ladies of the family. To say that the "forthcoming event" did not cast its "shadow before" and over them would not be true. Yet each and all endeavoured to rally their spirits, ignore the approaching tragedy, and keep up the thread of an animated conversation. In the midst of this scene the door opened, and a servant entered, bearing a card, which, with a bow, he presented to Lord Starr. The pasteboard bore the name of—

"*Peter Maraudey*," and the words—

"*Entreats an immediate interview with his excellency on a matter of life and death.*"

"Madam, and young ladies, will you have the goodness to excuse me?" suavely inquired Lord Starr, as he arose. "Assuredly, sir," was the affable reply.

And with a bow the Home Secretary left the table and the dining-room, and passed into the parlour, where Mr. Maraudey awaited him.

The stout priest arose and bowed, but the Home Secretary clasped his hand in a friendly shake, motioned him to resume his seat, took a chair beside him, and inquired in what manner he could be so happy as to serve Mr. Maraudey.

"I come, your lordship, upon a matter of life and death," said the priest solemnly.

"So your note informed me. May I inquire what that matter of life and death may be?"

"Sir, it concerns Mr. Gerald Mostyn, now under sentence of death in the county jail, and ordered for execution."

The Home Secretary suddenly grew very grave, and remained silent, with his chin dropped upon his breast, and his right hand buried in his bosom, in an attitude of deep thought.

"Sir," continued the priest, "I come in the strong hope of obtaining from your lordship a reprieve for that unhappy young man."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Mr. Maraudey, I regret very much that it does not lie within my prerogative to grant your request. The pardoning, commuting, and respiting power pertaining to the Crown, is only to be exercised under certain conditions, which really do not attend the present case. I have before explained this to the friends of Mr. Mostyn, who have come to me in his behalf," said the Home Secretary, with suave courtesy.

"But, sir," said the priest, "is not one of the conditions of pardon an ascertained error in the verdict of the jury, as, for instance, when the verdict of 'guilty' has been pronounced upon a man afterwards discovered to be innocent?"

"Assuredly; that is one of the most urgent reasons for the interference of the Crown."

"Then, sir, that reason exists in the case of Mr. Mostyn."

The Home Secretary shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows without further reply.

"Mr. Mostyn, sir, is really innocent of the crime for which he has been condemned."

"Assuredly," sneered the Home Secretary, "he is innocent by the verdict of his friends, but, unfortunately, by that of the jury he is guilty."

"Sir, Mr. Gerald Mostyn is *not* guilty!" said the priest, with deep solemnity.

"Of course not, by his own account. Now it is a remarkable and lamentable fact, that among all the criminals that are annually condemned and hanged, there is never to be found a guilty man. They are all a set of the most deeply-injured innocents to be found on earth."

"Sir, sir, this sarcasm sits not well upon the lips of your lordship," said the priest, in bitter sorrow.

"Reverend sir, I am aware that it does not, and therefore will answer you with due gravity, that I am sorry I am not able to receive either Mr. Mostyn's word, or your opinion, in proof of his innocence."

"Sir, I offer you no mere opinions. I do not only believe, but know Gerald Mostyn to be guiltless of the murder of Hugh Horne!" said the priest, with a

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

profound earnestness of manner, look, and tone, that carried strong conviction with it.

The minister stared.

"You know it?"

"I *know* it," responded the priest, with deep solemnity.

"How do you know this, may I inquire?" he then asked.

"By knowing the real murderer!"

"What! Take care, Mr. Maraudey. Be cautious, I pray you, how you implicate another in the crime that has been abundantly proved upon Gerald Mostyn. What evidence, I ask you, sir, can you give to support your statement?"

"I have the best possible evidence, the testimony of the conscience-stricken man who really did the murder."

"Sir, sir, remember what you are saying!" exclaimed the minister, beginning to get strongly excited.

"I do remember, your lordship. 'I am not mad, most noble Festus! but speak the words of truth and soberness.' I know what I am saying, Lord Starr."

"And you say that Gerald Mostyn is guiltless of the crime for which he is about to-morrow to suffer, and that you know the real murderer upon the evidence of his own statement?" "I do most distinctly."

"Then, sir, in heaven's name, *who* is the murderer?"

"Lord Starr, I am not at liberty to tell you."

"How, sir! Not at liberty to divulge the name of a criminal?" "No, my lord."

"Why, I beseech you?"

"Because, sir, the secret was confided to me by the conscience-stricken criminal, under the sacred seal of confession—a seal that my priestly oath forbids me under any circumstances, or in any emergency, to violate," said the father, solemnly.

"What, not even to bring a guilty man to justice, nor yet to save the innocent from unmerited punishment?"

"Not even for that, my lord; not even to save my own life from death could I break my clerical oath and violate the sacred seal of confession."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"But allow me to instruct you, sir, that the law recognizes no such oaths; you are legally bound to deliver up the murderer, since he is known to you."

The good priest bowed, but made no reply.

"Was, or is, the criminal a native of this country?" asked the minister.

"I must not answer your lordship's question," replied Maraudey. "What was the motive of his crime?"

"Your lordship will please to understand that I am not at liberty to answer any question that may point to the identity of the criminal, as that would involve a violation of the seals of confession."

"Am I to understand, sir, that while admitting that you know the real murderer of Hugh Horne, you refuse to divulge his identity?" "I do."

"Then it becomes my duty to arrest you, reverend sir," said the Minister, rising and touching the bell.

A servant entered to answer the summons.

"Go and request your master to come hither," said the Minister.

The man bowed and withdrew for a few minutes, at the end of which he returned, and ushered into the parlour Colonel North.

The old soldier bowed to, and shook hands with the priest, and then turned upon the Home Secretary a look of inquiry, as if to say—

"Well, what am I to do for you?"

"Answering that look, Lord Starr turned, and gravely addressing his host, said—

"You are one of the justices of the peace for this county, I believe, sir?"

"I have that honour," replied the colonel, much wondering at the question.

"Then I here charge Peter Maraudey, Catholic priest, of St. Andrew's, as an accessory after the fact to the murder of Hugh Horne, and also as being guilty of compounding a felony, in wilfully concealing the name of a principal in the crime. And I request, Mr. Justice, that he be arrested and examined upon this charge," said Lord Starr, resuming his seat, while the astounded Colonel North strove to collect his scattered faculties.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

As soon as he found the use of his tongue, he began to express his astonishment, and to exclaim—

"Arrest good Mr. Maraudey! and as an accessory to—? Well, what next, I wonder? A touch of an earthquake, I hope, to give us a good shaking up at once, and be done with it."

"If, sir, you will swear me as a witness, I prefer to make a statement on oath," said the Minister.

Colonel North bowed, took his seat at the table, formed his little impromptu court, administered the oath, and took the statement of Lord Starr. Then he examined Mr. Maraudey, who frankly told him all that had been related to the Minister; but refused to give any more particular information.

"But you would not for this cause send the good father to prison?" expostulated Colonel North.

The Minister bowed.

The magistrate shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, I do not mind——" began the priest.

"Oh, if you 'do not *mind*,' that is another affair," said Colonel North, very dryly. Whereupon an officer was summoned, a warrant made out, and Mr. Maraudey committed to the county jail.

As he was leaving the house he turned and said—

"Your lordship will at least procure a respite to the prisoner under sentence of death!"

"I cannot answer or satisfy you upon that point," replied Lord Starr, with a sardonic smile, as he paid back to the priest his own words.

Mr. Maraudey bowed, and followed the officer who had him in charge.

But Lord Starr, with all his faults of character, was not the man to hang another whom he had any reason to believe guiltless.

He set out for London that very night, and as soon as the necessary forms could be passed, he sent down the respite to Llyndell, where it arrived late on the night preceding the day fixed for the execution of Gerald Mostyn.

"It is now ten o'clock. Where can I get a messenger who can cross the mountains and ride to Gwyn to be in

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

time to save that man?" inquired Colonel North in dismay.

"Dr. Heath has just arrived on his fast horse, Hassan. He would kill his horse, I know, to save the fellow," remarked a gentleman present.

And accordingly Dr. Heath was summoned, and gladly undertook the delivery of the respite, which he accordingly and punctually accomplished.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SECOND LOVE-MATCH.

LEAVING stout Mr. Maraudey in the clutches of the law, and leaving the unfortunate Gerald Mostyn and his faithful wife in the prison cell to which he had been remanded, it is now necessary to the elucidation of our story that we should visit another habitation, which, though more cheerful in its superficial aspect, was scarcely less gloomy in its interior spirit.

Radnor House was a beautiful building of white stone, with porches running along the whole front from basement to roof. Behind it arose a background of wooded mountain. Before it fell the valley, rolling in undulating hills down to the banks of the rapid river. Externally the whole scene was radiant with life and beauty.

Pass the threshold of the house, and all was changed.

Within a luxurious chamber of that sumptuous dwelling, Mrs. Horne, the mistress of the mansion, lay slowly expiring. Thus she had lain many days, and thus she might lay many days longer, in a state that was neither life nor death.

From the night of the murder of old Hugh Horne she had slowly failed. But so much of fitful gloom and eccentricity characterized her malady, that her friends did not scruple to ascribe her strange moods to partial insanity.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

While still living beneath the same roof with her husband, she entirely separated herself from him. Though, as long as she was able to do so, she had scrupulously fulfilled her duties as the mistress of his household, yet she had avoided his society and conversation.

From the time of the arrest of Gerald Mostyn for the murder of Hugh Horne, her malady had greatly increased. She had watched the trial with intense and fearful interest. When, at length, she had heard of his conviction and sentence, she had sunk back fainting upon the bed, from which she was destined never more to rise.

And from this time her husband durst not even cross the threshold of her chamber, for at the sight of his face she invariably fell into violent convulsions, that threatened speedily to terminate her life. This seemed the more extraordinary as Dr. Horne had always enjoyed the reputation of being a constant and devoted husband, and Mrs. Horne had also the character of a fond and faithful wife. And no one could solve the mystery of this new and strange antagonism, or ascribe its existence to any other cause than monomania on the part of Mrs. Horne.

Her husband was constrained to avoid her apartment, where nothing but distress greeted his appearance. Her friends felt compelled to abandon a house so full of gloom and terror, where all evil influences seemed to congregate.

Only Alice Owen, the gentle young nurse, remained faithful to the suffering lady.

Since Dr. Horne had been obliged to absent himself from her sight, his place as her physician had been filled by Francis Heath, whose wise and gentle ministrations, conjoined to those of Alice Owen, would have soothed and restored the unhappy lady, could any human power have saved her.

But if the young physician with his utmost skill and attention, did not succeed in doing more than alleviating his patient's sufferings, he did not fail to observe and admire the disinterested devotion of the sweet young girl who, regardless of fatigue, day and night devoted

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

herself, with saint-like patience, to the service of the sufferer. Day by day the beauty of her soul, no less than the loveliness of her face and form, more and more deeply impressed his imagination and his heart. But he felt that the house of mourning was for every reason an improper place for his wooing, and thus it was that the love which had taken so deep root in his heart remained unspoken, though not unrevealed; for it found a certain and intelligible expression in the softer glances of his eyes, and the deeper tones of his voice, and the gentler deference in his manner in addressing her.

And Alice knew that she was beloved, and felt that she also loved; and yet so well she guarded her own eyes and tones, and manner, that no sign of this reciprocity of feeling escaped her. And whether her conduct was governed by maiden modesty, or morbid self-respect, is not known; but it is certain that Dr. Heath was left in doubt as to the feelings of his lady-love.

Francis Heath had known Alice Owen long enough, and studied her character and disposition closely enough, to feel sure that she was all his heart could desire, or his reason approve, in a wife, and he felt that he esteemed and loved her beyond all living women; yet, having resolved to delay his wooing to some more appropriate time and place, he confined himself to such deferential attentions as a gentleman might anywhere pay a lady.

But our strong resolutions often give way to impulse or yield to circumstances.

One morning the young physician, standing by the bedside of his patient, heard her murmur to herself—

"What will become of Alice when I am gone?"

"Aye, what indeed?" thought the doctor—"for after the death of her patroness, the world will not permit her to remain beneath the roof of a young widower, without any lady at the head of his house! What, then, will become of the orphan girl? Who will receive her? Whither can she go? Ah! this question pressing upon my heart, changes my whole duty. I must have an explanation with her at once, so that when she withdraws from this roof, she will go forth as my wife, to a home of her own."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

With these generous thoughts and purposes occupying his mind and heart, he left the chamber of his patient, and went down into the lower hall.

Providence seemed to favour his wishes. Contrary to her usual practice, Alice Owen had left the sick room, and was now standing at the parlour door, seemingly awaiting the doctor, for as he appeared she beckoned him into the parlour, and begged him to satisfy her as to the present condition and future prospects of his patient.

"Francis Heath replied with simple and straightforward candour, giving but little hope of her restoration to health. On receiving his answer, Alice bowed gently, and was about to withdraw from the room, when the lover respectfully intercepted her by saying—

"Miss Owen, will you give me the favour of a very few moments' conversation with you?"

Alice gravely bowed assent, and seated herself in the chair that he placed for her accommodation.

Francis Heath then placed himself beside and a little behind her, so that he need not embarrass her by too direct a front view, and resting his hand on the back of her chair, he stooped, and after a little embarrassment and hesitation, began—

"Alice, you and I have known each other for nearly three years. What I think of you need not be spoken, as it is about to be proved; and I hope that you, Alice, regard me as an honest and thriving man, who is both willing and able to take care of the woman who may bless him with her hand."

The doctor paused.

Alice neither looked up nor spoke, but remained with her chin dropped upon her breast, and her hands crossed upon her lap.

"The meaning of all this is, Alice, that I love you. Will you be my wife?" whispered Francis, stooping closer to her ear.

Still Alice neither spoke nor moved, except to close her eyes to stop the tears which else would have rolled down her cheeks; but which now hung, glistening drops of dew, on the dark fringes of her eyelashes.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Dear Alice, you do not answer me. Well, love, I will not distress you. Only let me take your hand, and I will understand that I am to be blessed with your acceptance of my love." And suiting the action to the word, he clasped her fingers, and would have raised them to his lips, but she gently withdrew her hand, and in a voice so low that he had to stoop quite low to hear her, she answered—

"Dr. Heath, I thank you sincerely for the honour you have done me; but I beg that you will withdraw your proposal, and forget that it ever was made."

Deeply distressed by this rejection, yet impressed by the exquisite delicacy with which it was worded, Dr. Heath remained for a few minutes silently regarding her. Then in faltering tones he asked—

"Alice, will you permit me to inquire *why* you have given me this answer?"

"Yes. 'Pity,' they say, 'is kin to love.' You have seen me here, and compassionated my orphaned condition, and you call that *love* which is truly *mercy*," was the gentle reply.

"Alice, listen to me. The Lord knoweth that my love never sprang from so disparaging a sentiment as pity. It was born of admiration rather. Dear Alice, is this the only reason why you reject me?"

"No, I have others. You do not know whom you honour with your preference, Dr. Heath."

"I do—a fair, good girl—a sweet and noble woman!"

"A poor maiden rather, who is not only quite penniless, but is also of very humble birth. My mother, Dr. Heath, was a seamstress, who used to sew for old Mr. Horne, and who, dying, left her daughter in deep destitution. Mr. Horne, who was much better than ever was believed of him, took the friendless child, and placed her at school, and afterwards received her into his home, and would have provided for her future had he been spared to do so. You, Francis Heath, are of an old and respectable family, who might never consent to receive the insignificant girl whom you favour with your affection."

"Alice, what is all this to me or to you? I am not a

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

boy to be guided by the opinions or biassed by the prejudices of others. I am a man near thirty years of age, capable, one would suppose, of judging for myself. I love you, Alice. I begin to think, also, that I am not indifferent to you. With your consent I wish to make you my wife. Come, if you have no more serious objections than those you have specified, I will still hope soon to claim this dear hand as mine," he said, again clasping her fingers, and carrying them to his lips.

Alice withdrew them, and pressed both hands to her face, to keep back the tears that were swelling to her eyes, as she answered—

"But I *have* other objections, sir. Dr. Heath, you are rising to distinction in your profession. If you should unite your fate with one so poor and obscure as myself, you would seriously compromise your interests. Whereas, if you should marry a lady of your own station, you would greatly enhance your fortunes. Believe me, I am worldly-wise enough to understand that."

"Worldly wisdom has come too soon to you. You do not know how to apply it. Alice, I want no wife to help forward my fortunes. I think I can push forward alone, and conquer a standing-place for both myself and wife—my wife, who can be no other woman than yourself. Come, my love—come, Alice—give me a frank reply. Tell me that you will be mine."

"Francis Heath, I cannot. Do not urge me, please. The most I can do for you is, to say that if, at the end of a year, and after mature deliberation, you should feel disposed to renew this proposal, why *then* I may give you a different answer."

"Will you—will you, my love? Then hear me pledge myself—"

"No, no; you must not pledge yourself to anything. You must remain absolutely free to change your mind if it should so please you before the year of probation is out. That is the only possible way of testing and proving for yourself the reality and durability of your present feelings. Forgive my frankness."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Oh, Alice, Alice, but this is a very hard condition!"

"It is a very necessary one. But I have left my patient too long already. I must go to her. Good-day, Dr. Heath."

And swiftly and silently, as a light withdrawn, Alice disappeared from the room.

It was a few hours after this that the news of the respite of Gerald Mostyn reached Radnor, and was conveyed to Mrs. Horne. The poor sufferer smiled with delight on hearing the glad tidings, and for a few days she rallied. But her health was too far gone to admit hope of her ultimate recovery.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A VILLAINOUS DOCTOR.

IF this true-hearted lover appeared sent from Heaven for the future stay and support of her helpless orphanage, Alice had another suitor that seemed as surely sent from Hades for her torment and destruction.

For months past Alice had seen with shuddering fear that, whenever she chanced to be left alone with Dr. Horne, he would invariably fix his eyes upon her with a sinister and dangerous meaning.

Without seeming to notice these alarming glances, Alice would quietly withdraw from his presence, and confining herself to the sick room of her friend, keep as much as possible from his society.

But great is the strength and perseverance of evil. In the lonely halls and passages he contrived to waylay and intercept the poor maiden, as she passed to and from the upper to the lower rooms; he would join her, walk by her side, take and press her hand, and drop words of admiration into her ears.

At such times she would break from him in terror and flee away, ashamed, shuddering, and cowering, to the sanctuary of the sick-room.

But evil is hard to be repulsed. All her fear and horror of his admiration seemed but to add fuel to the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

fire of his passion. His pursuit grew more vigilant, artful, and persecuting. It seemed impossible to avoid falling into the snares constantly and covertly laid for her destruction. She would have left the house, even though it had been to perish in the wilderness, had it not been for the poor invalid who was so dependent on her care. But she secluded herself still more rigidly in the sick chamber. She took her slender meals there; she slept there on a sofa bedstead. And if anything were wanted from below, she rang and made a servant bring it. Thus the poor fawn hoped to escape the hunter. Alas! how vainly!

She should, at all cost to herself and others, have fled from that house of peril, for fruitless were all other means to save herself from evil.

One fatal day she fell into the snare set for her destruction. Dr. Horne—as all the household supposed—left home for a day's absence.

It happened that about the middle of the afternoon, Alice had occasion to go to the parlour cupboard to get a restorative cordial for her patient. Believing that her persecutor was miles away, she entered without fear or misgiving the silent and deserted room.

She had procured the article of which she had come in search, and was about to leave the room, when the figure of Dr. Horne, entering by the only door, arrested her astonished sight.

While she stood gazing upon him in a sort of panic, he quietly closed and locked the door and withdrew the key, which he placed in his pocket, keeping his eyes upon his purposed victim all the while.

With her own gaze fixed upon the ground, Alice advanced towards the fastened door, and placing her hand upon the knob of the latch, said, in constrained tones— "Let me pass, if you please, Dr. Horne."

"He turned upon her a sarcastic gaze, and answered—

"I thank you very much for opening a conversation with me, Miss Owen. It was an honour for which I should scarcely have dared to hope, judging from your late conduct to me."

"Dr. Horne," said the maiden, with great dignity, "I

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

came hither to procure a cordial for your suffering wife. I beg you will let me return to her immediately."

"No, Alice, not until you have heard me! for I, too, suffer, more perchance than she does. I, too, need your pity, more, I am sure, than she does."

Alice turned in loathing from him, and walked towards the window.

He followed her, and seized her hand, and held it in a firm grasp, while he said—

"Alice! there is a silent warfare between us that must come to an end. You well know its nature. You have inspired me with a passion which has destroyed my peace."

"Wretch! how dare you address such words to me! Unhand me, sir!" she exclaimed, breaking from him, and running to a window, which she endeavoured vainly to raise. He laughed.

"Call, beautiful Alice! Call aloud! wake all the mountain echoes, if you like! but not one servant will answer your summons! they are all sent from the place! only you and I and that comatose invalid in the other wing of the building remain in this house! You are in my power, fair Alice! And now, at last, by all the fiends in Hades, you shall hear me!" he said, repossessing himself of her hand, and compelling her to be seated.

"There! fear nothing more from me, Alice! I only wish to compel you to hear me! I should scorn to constrain you further! a willing surrender or none at all for me! You must now listen to me; for it is an honest love and an honourable position that I would offer you!"

"Wretch! how dare you speak so! Think of the dying woman above-stairs, and for very pity be silent!" exclaimed Alice, blushing with indignation.

"I do think of that dying woman. Alice, she is no wife of mine. Twelve months ago, she repudiated me from her heart. In a very few days she must pass from this earth, and I shall be free to wed again. Alice! return my love, and the first use I shall make of my freedom will be to make you my wife," he

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

whispered, passing his arm around her waist, and attempting to kiss her.

"Demon! a thousand deaths would I die rather! Oh! my very ears are condemned that they have heard your words!" exclaimed Alice, breaking from him, and standing at bay.

"Fear not, Alice! I repeat that I shall use no rudeness towards you! You shall be a willing conquest or none! You despise the passion you have kindled, the pain you have caused. But mark my words, young woman! before another week shall be over, you shall sue for the love that you now reject!"

"Fiend! what if I were to expose your villainy?" she exclaimed.

"No one would believe you, Alice! that is all! You are sufficiently in my power! I delay my triumph only for some serener hour! In token whereof, I suffer you to go! Pass out, fair Alice!" And holding open the door, he permitted her to retire from the room.

A chill of superstitious dread, inspired by the calm, cold cruelty of his threats, crept over the maiden as she regained her friend's sick room. She administered the cordial to the patient, adjusted her pillows, arranged her coverlid, made her otherwise comfortable, and then sat down to reflect.

The scene that had just passed between Dr. Horne and herself, rendered it absolutely necessary that she should withdraw from the house.

Her mind was now made up, and her plan arranged. She would write a note to her friend, Mrs. Osborne, requesting the shelter of her hospitable roof for a few days, until she could find another situation as lady's companion or seamstress. She would have this note ready for Francis Heath to convey to his sister.

She lost no time in carrying her plan into execution; and without hinting to her lover the reason why she wished to leave the house, she entrusted him with the letter to be delivered.

Then she wrote a second note addressed to Dr. Horne, and warning him to seek the services of another

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

attendant for his wife, as *she* was about to leave the house. This note received no manner of reply.

But the next day, when Dr. Heath arrived on his professional visit, he brought with him a letter from Mrs. Osborne to Alice Owen, cordially offering to her a home in the parsonage for so long as she should see fit to favour its inmates with her presence. In addition to this, Dr. Heath informed Alice that his horse and gig were at her orders to convey her to the parsonage.

Alice was constrained to accept his kindness; and that very afternoon she packed up her little wardrobe and prepared to leave the house of evil. She took a tender leave of her almost unconscious patient, pressing kisses on her cold brow, and charging her old nurse, Glenn, to watch and tend her carefully. Mrs. Glenn, who was lost in amazement at this sudden flitting of Alice, promised to do all that was required of her.

Alice then went down into the hall where Francis Heath awaited to conduct her to the gig which was standing before the door.

Her lover lifted her in, carefully arranged her seat, drew the cover up over her lap, and then went to see that her trunk was well secured behind.

During the few seconds that he was absent from her side upon this errand, Dr. Horne came out of the house up to the gig, and stooping to Alice's ear, whispered, so that no one but herself could hear—

"You think that you have eluded me, fair saint—we shall see!" And having said this, he bowed pleasantly on meeting Francis Heath, and retired into the porch.

Alice sank back in her seat, shuddering with a vague and terrible presentiment of some awful calamity at hand.

"Why—will you permit me to ask—have you left your friend, my dear Alice?" inquired Francis Heath, as he gathered up the reins and started his horse.

"Because," answered Alice, evasively, "the trials of the situation were getting to be too heavy for me; I should have fallen ill on their hands."

"You might, indeed. I do not think that you have

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

had a night's rest for many weeks past. I am glad that you have left."

Alice made no direct reply; she was willing that he should remain in ignorance of the deep insult she had received, and which was the true reason of her departure from the house. As she continued silent, her lover spoke again—

"You will feel less regret in leaving your friend, from the fact that she has been much more composed in mind since she heard of the respite of Mr. Mostyn."

"Yes," answered Alice, "it is wonderful how deeply she has been affected by the whole of that tragedy from first to last. No one felt the murder of old Mr. Horne so grievously as she did; and yet she was not nearly connected either by blood or friendship with the murdered or the murderer. How strange!"

"Passing strange! But, dear Alice, why did you say the *murderer!* Since the revelation made to the Minister by Mr. Maraudey many people believe Mr. Mostyn to be innocent."

"Oh, I would that they were right! I would that I, too, could believe that story! but, oh! sir, it can weigh nothing against the evidence of my own senses. You know what I, myself, saw with my own eyes and heard with my own ears!"

"But what, then, Alice, can you make of this story told by Mr. Maraudey?"

"I know not. It may possibly be that the penitent in question was a madman, who only imagined what he told to Mr. Maraudey, or it may be that he was some devoted friend, more jealous than scrupulous, who took this way to save Mr. Mostyn. Has Mr. Maraudey yet given any clue to his identity?"

"No; he was brought up yesterday, when, refusing to testify, he was committed for contempt. It is a matter of conscience with him, and it is really very doubtful whether there is any law to compel him, *in this case*—to do so."

"One thing I know," said Alice, "that Mr. Maraudey would die in prison rather than break his oath."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"He is at least likely to remain in prison a long time," said Dr. Heath.

They were now beginning to descend the mountain; and the road was so difficult and dangerous, that her lover was compelled to give his whole attention to his horse, and the conversation ceased. When they had safely reached the foot of the pass, a few yards of level road under the shadow of the ridge brought them to the parsonage.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ALICE ARRESTED FOR THEFT.

THE pale clouds that had been gathering all the afternoon now overcast the whole sky. It was beginning to snow as they alighted at the parsonage gate.

"Run in! for mercy's sake, run in!" cried Mrs. Osborne, appearing at the hall door.

They lost no time in obeying her summons.

"We are always bound to have at least one very deep snow, and I think that this is the very article!" said Dr. Heath, as he beat the light flakes from his own garments, and gently brushed them from those of Alice, before entering the neat hall.

Mrs. Osborne shook hands with her brother, and embraced Alice—thus giving both a warm welcome.

"You must nurse her a little—she is very much worn down," said Dr. Heath, with a glance full of affectionate solicitude directed towards Alice.

"She does look pale and anxious. But in our quiet home she will soon recover," replied the pastor's wife, tenderly kissing her guest, as she led her into the bright little parlour of the parsonage, and seated her on the sofa by the fire.

How different was the atmosphere here! Alice felt as if she had escaped from a house of deadly peril, and passed into a home of safety and comfort.

Mrs. Osborne, with sisterly care, relieved her of her outer garments, and took them from the room, while

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Dr. Heath placed a footstool under her feet, and arranged the cushions at the back of her head.

"There! rest, dear Alice," he said, "you have tended others so long, that now you must in your turn be cared for."

"This is, indeed, like the repose of paradise," said Alice, as she yielded herself up to the comforts of her position.

Dr. Heath mended the fire, and smiled at his guest.

When Mrs. Osborne re-entered the room she rang for lights, saying, that though it was early in the afternoon, still, as it was so dark with snow-clouds, the windows had as well be closed, and the lamps lighted, "Which will make us feel all the more cozy and comfortable," she added, as she shut the blinds, and let down the thick crimson curtains.

When the neat and smiling little parlour-maid appeared with the lighted lamps, which she placed at each side of the mantel-piece, her mistress said—

"And now, Hetty, lay the table for tea in this room, which is so much warmer than the dining-hall."

The little maid curtsied obedience, and with the help of Francis, who started up to assist her, she wheeled the table into the middle of the floor, and then vanished from the room.

And soon she returned, and spread the snow-white damask cloth, and arranged the pure white Sevres china upon the table. Then she brought the crystal lump-sugar, the rich cream, the light biscuits, and the golden fresh butter, and set them in order upon the board. Her mistress went to the parlour cupboard, and produced her store of preserves and cakes. The clear, crimson currant-jelly, the golden pomegranate, the ruby quince, the emerald citron sweetmeats, rich queen cakes, delicate lady-fingers, and fragrant crullers—all the work of her own hands, were arranged in cut-glass saucers, or silver filigree baskets, and placed upon the table.

"Shall I fetch the tea-urn, now, madam?" inquired the little maiden.

"No, Hetty, not just yet; we must wait a few

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

moments for Mr. Osborne. He rode over to Llyndell, Alice, to see the old lady," said Mrs. Osborne, as she took a seat near her guest.

Then there followed some kind inquiries as to the present condition of the suffering invalid at Radnor.

"You go out so little, Alice, that you do not hear as much as I do. But do you know that Mrs. Horne's illness is considered a very mysterious affair? People cannot imagine why she should take so great an interest in the fate of a man who is almost an entire stranger to her—one whom she has not met more than three times in her life. And how do you think the wiseacres attempt to account for it?"

"I do not know, indeed, madam," replied the young girl.

"Why, Alice, they dare even to say that Mrs. Horne was in love with Gerald Mostyn."

"That is infamous!" exclaimed Alice, indignantly.

"Aye! and they pity Dr. Horne—such a good man, such a devoted husband—to be so wronged."

"I have nothing more to say," said Alice, flushing crimson at this slander of her friend.

"It is beneath comment, certainly," admitted Mrs. Osborne. "But a truce to gossip. Alice, my sweet sister, I have such a pretty little chamber for you. It is the room in the wing that opens on the front porch, and is furnished with the white enamelled cottage-chamber furniture, and has the white lace curtains to the windows; a perfect bower of beauty is your bedroom, sweet Alice."

"You are too good—you overwhelm me with kindness!" replied the grateful girl.

"Hush!" whispered the lady, bending close to her ear, "I please myself in serving my sweet sister. Yes, I know it all, Alice; and you are not to take another situation, or leave us at all any more, until you leave us as my brother's wife, to take the head of his establishment."

Alice blushed with mingled emotions of grateful joy and girlish shame, while her lover turned upon his sister and herself a beaming smile of pleasure.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"And now we will not wait another moment for Mr. Osborne, who, ten to one, is taking tea with the Llyndell ladies. And you look so weary, love, that you shall have your tea, and then retire to your sweet little room to take a good night's rest, for to-morrow we are to have a dinner-party to meet the bishop, who is expected here; and my brother's affianced bride must look fresh and bright to help me receive them," added the lady, aa she arose and rang the bell.

"Bring up the tea-urn, Hetty," she said to the little maiden, who appeared at the door.

Hetty curtsied and withdrew, and presently returned witt the silver service, which she placed upon the table. Chairs were set, and at the invitation of the hostess, the little circle of three gathered around the board.

"You take black tea, I believe, Alice. Francis, you like rice waffles: there are some very nice hot ones that Hetty is offering at your elbow. Help Alice and yourself," said the lady, "on hospitable cares intent."

As her brother turned to obey there was a loud ringing at the front-door bell.

"That is Mr. Osborne, now—just in time. Run, Hetty, and let your master in."

The little maid hastened to comply.

"I am glad he has come. Tea always tastes better when he is at the table," said the affectionate wife, as she put sugar and cream into a fourth cup, ready to fill up.

The little maid came in, saying—

"Please, madam, it isn't master. It is a man from Llyndell, as says how master can't just yet leave Mrs. Horton, who is took very ill, and wants the doctor directly."

"Mrs. Horton ill? I am very sorry!" exclaimed Mrs. Osborne; while Francis Heath arose from his untasted supper, and hurried to the door to make more particular inquiries. In a few moments he came back, great-coated and capped, ready for his ride, saying—"It is an attack of apoplexy. I must hasten to her immediately!"

o

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"But dear me! won't you stop and get your tea before turning out in this snow-storm?" inquired his sister, anxiously.

"No! there is no time—a moment's delay may be fatal to her life! Good-bye!"

"When will you be back?"

"I cannot tell. It may be not until morning. Do not sit up for me!" replied the doctor, bowing and hurrying away.

"There! you see what it is to be a physican, Alice. He never sits down to a meal with any certainty of being able to finish it before he is called off; or gets into his warm bed without a reasonable probability of being called up at midnight. So you may partly judge what may be the lot of a physician's wife! Draw up, Alice. 'Let the world slide,' while we take our tea. Hetty, these waffles are cold; bring a plate of hot ones."

"I feel sorry that Mrs. Horton is ill," said Alice.

"My dear, so am I, but—it does not take away my appetite. Here come the hot waffles—take one."

At that moment there was a second ringing of the door-bell.

"Good gracious! Surely people think we have a party here to-night. But that must be Mr. Osborne at last. Run, Hetty, and see!" exclaimed the lady.

The little servant flew to open the door.

"Those are strange voices. Who can they be? inquired Mrs. Osborne listening.

Her question was almost immediately answered by the re-appearance of the maid, saying—

"If you please, ma'am, two men asking for Miss Alice Owen."

"For me?" exclaimed Alice, in surprise.

"For Alice!" ejaculated the lady, in astonishment.

"Yes, ma'am, please, here they are," replied the maid, as two men, recognized by Mrs. Osborne as constables, entered the parlour.

They bowed awkwardly, and hesitated a little, while the ladies gazed upon them in perplexity.

"You—did you wish to see anyone here? Have you any business with us?—or—is there not some mistake?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

inquired Mrs. Osborne, who was the first to recover from her surprise.

"It's no mistake, I reckon, mum. Which of you ladies is Miss Alice Owen?" inquired the foremost man, producing a document from his coat-pocket.

"Why this young lady is Miss Owen; but you can have no possible business with her!"

"Well, yes, mum, we have a little, I reckon."

"But what can it be at this time of night? Does any one need her?"

"Well, yes, mum, I s'pose the magistrate wants her just a little."

"As a witness in some new case—what a worry!"

"Well, I reckon I might as well out with it, mum. It is a very onpleasant thing; but you see, to make a long matter short, I have a warrant for her arrest."

"Arrest!"

"Well, yes, mum, I'm sorry to say."

Both ladies gazed with renewed astonishment upon the speaker.

"But upon what possible ground can Miss Alice Owen be arrested?" inquired Mrs. Osborne, in dismay.

"I do not owe a debt in the world!" exclaimed Alice, in consternation.

"It's not for debt, young lady," said the constable.

"In the name of Heaven, what is it for, then?" inquired Mrs. Osborne.

"Miss Alice Owen is arrested upon the charge of theft."

"THEFT!"

"Well, yes, mum, I'm sorry to say."

Alice covered her face with her hands, and sank back half fainting in her chair, while Mrs. Osborne, panic-stricken, gazed upon the officers.

"Don't be frightened, mum. If the young lady is innocent, as I would lay my life she is, judging from her looks, it will all come out right before the justice," said the constable.

"But by whom is she accused—good Heaven—of theft?"

"By Dr. Horne, her late employer, mum."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"It is a plot! oh, it is a plot for my destruction," gasped Alice, in a dying voice.

"By Dr. Horne! It cannot be! Dr. Horne is an honourable man, who would die rather than bring such a charge against an innocent girl!" exclaimed the lady.

"But here it stands, mum, in black and white, under the county seal."

"Oh! it is a plot! it is a plot for my ruin, if you knew all!" groaned Alice.

"Be patient, dear girl! It is some grievous mistake that will be explained," said Mrs. Osborne.

"It is no mistake, I reckon, mum—I mean so far as the dokerment goes. As to the young lady, I believe it *is* a mistake, and will be proved one. But, mum, our time is short, and we have also another warrant here, authorizing us to search the effects of Miss Alice Owen for certain property said to have been stolen by her."

"Hold your tongue for decency's sake, man! Never say such things of a respectable young lady."

"Certainly, mum; but it is in the warrant which we must proceed to execute. Will you be so good as to show us where certain trunks and boxes, brought by Miss Owen from Radnor, can be found, that we may examine them?"

"I brought but one small trunk, which holds all my clothes. It has not been opened since I came here. Dear Mrs. Osborne, show them where it is, that they may examine it and satisfy themselves!" cried Alice, seizing this opportunity of vindicating, as she supposed, her innocence.

"What degradation!" exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, in great bitterness.

"Not at all, mum—not at all. We're all liable to suffer injustice of one sort or another, and if the missing articles should not be found in the young lady's possession, why, so much the better for her," said the constable.

"Oh, yes, madam, yes! so it will be! I must not be too proud to submit to an investigation that will

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

prove my innocence. Let them search," said Alice, earnestly.

"Alas, my dear, we could not prevent them if we wished to do so, therefore we have no choice. Well, then, follow me; I will conduct you to Miss Owen's chamber," said Mrs. Osborne, taking up a candle, and leading the way from the parlour.

The two constables attended her to the hall, but there one turned back to beckon Alice.

"Need I come, too?" she inquired, naively.

"Certainly, young lady; you are under arrest, and we dare not lose sight of you," answered the principal officer.

Alice, without demur, followed them across the hall, and into the pretty chamber in the wing that had been appropriated to her use.

There under the window sat the little black leather trunk that was to be examined. Mrs. Osborne pointed it out to the officers.

"Where is the key?" asked the first constable.

"Oh, I forgot; here it is," said Alice, producing it from her pocket.

The officer knelt and unlocked the trunk.

A poor but clean and neatly folded wardrobe was all that the lifting of the lid revealed. As these were taken out and unfolded, article by article, nothing was discovered but the nice and orderly habits of the owner; while the constable muttered to himself,—

"Don't see nothing like the missing articles; must be a fool's errand we are sent on;" until at last, when they had reached the bottom of the trunk, he exclaimed, in surprise—

"Ah! good gracious! here is the stolen property!" and lifted a red morocco casket, which he opened, displaying to their astounded eyes a rich set of oriental pearls.

"In the name of Heaven, what is the meaning of this, Alice?" inquired Mrs. Osborne, in horror.

"It means that I am betrayed and ruined," exclaimed the wretched girl, in a deep, sepulchral voice, as, with a

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

face overspread with the ghastly pallor of death, she sunk into the nearest chair.

The two officers of justice then coolly proceeded with their business.

"Just read over the list of missing articles to see if they are all here, Jarvis," said the first constable, McNab, holding the casket in his hand.

The other obeyed, reading from the paper that he held in his hand.

"'One red morocco casket, containing jewellery, as follows:—one pearl tiara, one pair of pearl ear-rings, one pearl necklace, one pearl brooch, one pearl bracelet, the whole valued at fifteen hundred pounds;' is that right?"

"Yes, and here they all are," said the constable, who, having identified the property, closed the casket. Then, turning towards the spot where the young girl sat in a deathlike stupor, he said—

"I am sorry for this, young lady; I am afraid it will go very hard with you."

"Alice, will you explain this?" cried Mrs. Osborne, in deep distress.

"As far as I can. I never set my eyes on that casket before this hour. It was put into my trunk with the design to ruin me, I am sure of it!" gasped the almost expiring girl.

"Oh, Alice! do not say so, my child. No human being could be so diabolical. Besides, what motive could any one have to ruin you? You have no enemies."

"You think, then," said Alice, in a hollow voice, "that I am capable of——"

"No, no; my life upon your innocence!" exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, eagerly interrupting her, "but some one certainly put the casket in your trunk for safety, and you, unconscious of its presence there, brought it away; and such will be proved the case, no doubt. What I do find fault with in this matter, is Dr. Horne's inexcusable haste in charging an innocent and respectable girl with a degrading crime! I shall not soon forgive his rashness!"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Ah! do you think it was rashness? It was not rashness, but the most deliberate villainy!" exclaimed the wretched girl, in bitterness of spirit.

"Alice, your wrongs make you unjust! Believe me, this is a mistake which will soon be righted," said Mrs. Osborne, struggling with her own sense of shame and grief that she might in some sort lift up the fallen head of the poor young victim who stood before her.

"Well, mum," said McNab, "I am sorry to hurry this affair, but it is late, and we have a long way to go to the squire's, so that the young lady had better be getting on her things."

"Getting on her things? For what?"

"To go before Squire Jessup, mum."

"Surely, surely, you will not take her out this stormy night?" cried Mrs. Osborne.

"'Bliged to do so, mum. Warrant is peremptory."

"Oh! Alice, my child, what a calamity! Oh, good heaven! how I wish Mr. Osborne or my brother were here. Sirs, cannot you wait an hour, until I send for my husband and brother, who are at Llyndell?"

"Couldn't possibly do it, mum; we have already stayed too long," said the constable. Then turning to Alice, he added—"Come, young lady; come, make haste!"

But the young girl sat with her hands clasped convulsively upon her knees, the grayness of death spread over her face, and her eyes wildly staring into vacancy.

"Come, now, you know, this ain't a-goin' to do. You've got to get up and come along with us; and the longer you stop us, and the more trouble you give, the worse it will look, you know," said the officer, laying his hand upon her shoulder.

Alice shrank and shivered at that degrading touch, but seemed too lost in shame, and grief, and fear, to rise.

"Come, miss, come, I hope you don't mean to give us any trouble," said the man, attempting to rouse her.

But Alice shuddered, and seemed about to swoon.

"Come now, none o' that, you know, 'cause we're up

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

to all them tricks! Be a sensible young woman, and come along with us quiet," continued the officer, putting his arms about her waist, and lifting her upon her feet.

"Heaven of heavens! has it come to this? Oh, Alice! that I should ever have lived to see the day! What can I do for you, my lamb?" said Mrs. Osborne, wringing her hands in agony.

"You can do nothing—nothing; you must leave me to my fate!" exclaimed the helpless victim, between spasmodic gasps.

"If you would wish to do her any service, mum, control your own narves, and get her things for her to put on," said the constable.

"Yes—get them, dear, get them; the sooner I go—the sooner it is over—the better," said Alice, in the same gasping voice.

Mrs. Osborne, pale and trembling, and too strongly affected for tears, took the little straw bonnet and black cloth shawl from the bed, upon which they had been placed, and brought them to Alice.

"You are as white as marble, your hands are as cold as ice; you shake as with the ague," said the lady, as she tied the little bonnet on the head, and wrapped the shawl around the shoulders of the poor girl.

"A glass of wine, mum, for the Lord's sake, a glass of wine for her, or we shall never be able to get her alive to the magistrate's office," said the constable.

Mrs. Osborne ran out, and returned with the required restorative, which she applied to the lips of the almost expiring girl, who pushed it away, saying—

"No, no, I cannot—I will not; if I die, so much the better; oh, you ought to know that."

And no persuasion would induce her to change her purpose.

"Well, she is the obstinatest!" said the constable, as he supported her from the house to the chaise that was waiting to take her to the magistrate's office.

"You will tell him that I am innocent, but that he must resign me," said Alice, turning an appealing gaze upon her dear friend.

"He needs not to be told that you are innocent, and

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

he will never forsake you. I will send for him immediately; he will lose no time in following you," replied Mrs. Osborne, in a voice broken by anguish, as she pressed the poor girl to her bosom before resigning her to the care of the officer.

And the next moment Alice was lifted into the chaise, which was driven rapidly away.

"Oh, surely this is some horrible dream!" said Mrs. Osborne, with a shudder, as she returned to the house, forgetting in her great trouble even to shake off the snow that whitened all her dress.

She lost not a moment in despatching a messenger with the following note to Llyndell:—

"*Alice Owen has just been arrested upon a charge of grand larceny. For heaven's sake, as soon as you can leave Mrs. Horton, hasten hither.*"

Francis Heath was standing at the bedside of his patient when that note was put into his hand. He glanced over it, passed his hand before his eyes as if to clear his vision, read it again, flushed, grew pale, seized his hat, and, without a word of explanation, hurried from the house, leaving the astonished family to suppose that some patient in the very last extremity had summoned him away.

In an almost incredibly short time, Dr. Heath reached the parsonage, and rushed into the parlour, where he found his sister pacing up and down the floor, and wringing her hands in great distress.

"Sister, what is the meaning of this?" he exclaimed, in breathless anxiety.

"What I wrote. She has been arrested for grand larceny, at the suit of Dr. Horne."

"False! false! Good Heaven, you are mad or dreaming to say such a thing! Where is she? Let me see her!"

"She has gone off to Gwyn in custody of the constable. Sit down, Francis, or stand if you must, only be quiet three minutes, while I tell you all about it," said Mrs. Osborne, who then, in a hurried and rather

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

incoherent manner, related the whole history of the arrest.

"It is a mistake! It is infamous—infamous in Dr. Horne so rashly to judge, and so cruelly to charge an innocent girl." And without another word, he rushed out of the house, mounted his horse, and galloped rapidly off towards Gwyn.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ALICE BEFORE THE MAGISTRATE.

MEANWHILE, through storm and darkness, the open chaise laboured.

Stung and blinded by the falling and freezing snow, the driver on the front seat could scarcely keep the road, and for safety trusted less to his own senses and skill than he did to the horse's instinct.

Covered with sleet, Alice and the constable shrank and cowered into the back seat. Yet for the horror that seemed to freeze her heart, she could scarcely feel the surrounding intense coldness.

A long, dismal, and dangerous drive brought them at length to Gwyn, and to the house of Squire Jessup.

A single light shone through a window in the little wing now used by the squire as his office.

Before this wing the chaise stopped. The driver left his seat, and the policeman alighted and handed out Alice, and led her, half palsied with cold and terror, into the office of the presiding magistrate.

The magistrate was seated at his table, and near him also sat Dr. Horne.

As the eyes of the squire fell upon Alice, where she stood covered with sleet, and half fainting with shame, and grief, and fear, he could not forbear turning upon her accuser a questioning and rebuking look, as though he would have asked—

"Why force this fragile creature out on such a bitter night as this?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Dr. Horne understood the tacit inquiry, and answered as if it had been uttered—

"You will remember the great value of the articles purloined, and the urgent necessity of haste in order to recover them. Hence the need of this prompt arrest."

"Draw forward that leathern chair, McNab," said Mr. Jessup, addressing the constable; and when the man had obeyed, he turned to Alice, and said—

"Sit down, young woman."

Alice mechanically dropped into the chair, and because she felt half suffocated, threw the veil from her face.

"So young and beautiful, and so depraved!" the magistrate murmured, as he gazed upon the soft and lovely brunette face, with its languishing, dark eyes and clustering black ringlets.

"Ah," sighed Dr. Horne, "it is with the deepest pain that I appear here as her accuser. Nothing but despair of reforming her by moral suasion—nothing but the necessity of giving her a sharp lesson—(for this is not her first offence)—nothing, in short, but a strong sense of duty—could have constrained me to prosecute her."

The justice looked at the pale girl before him, and groaned for pity.

"I am innocent, indeed, sir, I am," said poor Alice, clasping her hands, and raising her eyes pleadingly to the magistrate's face.

"Poor child! God grant you may be proved so!" said the squire.

"Did your worship, in your official career, ever happen to meet with anyone who was guilty?" sneeringly inquired Dr. Horne.

The magistrate did not notice the sarcasm; his eyes were fixed upon Alice Owen.

"You found the casket?" inquired the doctor of the policeman.

"Yes, sir."

"Where?" "In her trunk."

"Very well—Mr. Jessup, what are we waiting for?" asked the accuser, impatiently, addressing the squire.

"Nothing, sir; I am ready to proceed with the case

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

if the prisoner is ready; but she has no defence," said the magistrate.

"Nor I any advocate; we stand upon equal terms," answered the accuser.

Very unwillingly the magistrate proceeded with his office.

Dr. Horne being sworn, deposed that Alice Owen had lived in his house, as the companion of his wife, for more than a year; that, during the last few months, he had missed many articles which had been traced to her possession; that upon her apparent repentance, he had frequently forgiven her; but that, finding her perfectly incorrigible, he had, at length, warned her to leave his house; that even then, wishing to shield her reputation, and so give her a chance of reform, he had, in discharging, forborne to accuse her, so that no one had reason to suppose that she had been dismissed, or had left the house at any other than her own will; that soon after her departure, he had chanced to open a bureau, in which the most valuable articles of family jewellery were kept, and missing his wife's casket of pearls, had naturally suspected Alice Owen of the theft, and immediately made a requisition for a search-warrant; and that, in justification of his proceeding, he begged the magistrate to swear and examine the constable who had served the warrant.

The officer being sworn, deposed to the finding of the casket of jewels in the possession of the accused.

The magistrate, whose first instinctive belief in Alice Owen's innocence now yielded to the force of evidence against her, turned towards her a countenance as full of sorrow as of severity, and inquired—

"What have you to say to this grave, serious charge, young woman?"

"That I am innocent! as the Lord lives, I am!" answered Alice, clasping her hands in agony.

"Your simple assertion cannot be taken against the weight of the testimony, unless you can satisfactorily account for the presence of the jewellery in your trunk," said Mr. Jessup.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Sir, I did not know that the casket was in my trunk until the constable took it out. I never even set eyes upon the jewellery it contains, or knew so much as its existence until the moment in which the constable displayed it to my view."

"How do you suppose, then, that it came into your trunk?"

The face of the young girl crimsoned with blushes; she did not reply.

"If you can explain how it came there without your knowledge or connivance, you had better do so," said the squire.

The poor girl struggled bravely against the overwhelming sense of shame that crushed her spirit to the dust, as, amid burning blushes, she answered—

"Sir, I may not be able to prove the fact, but I think they were put there by Dr. Horne, with the view to destroy me."

"Young woman! beware how you try to criminate a gentleman of Dr. Horne's indisputable integrity!" exclaimed the magistrate, indignant at what he supposed to be the base artifice of the accused.

"It is like her!" said Dr. Horne, coolly.

"What motive, pray, Miss Owen, could you suppose Dr. Horne to possess for injuring you?"

Alice strove more strenuously against the crushing sense of shame, and her cheeks, and brow, and neck were flushed with still more fiery blushes, as she answered—

"I must speak the truth, come what will of it, sir. This man, once my employer and now my accuser, pursued me with a sinful suit, threatening to destroy me if——"

Unable to complete the painful sentence, Alice dropped her face in both her hands, and shuddered as with an ague.

This action, that was indeed the effect of maiden modesty, looked so like conscious guilt, that the magistrate gazed upon her with his brows knit into the severest frown.

"It is precisely like all her conduct," said Dr. Horne.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"You will now have an opportunity of witnessing that girl's double-distilled duplicity."

"Young woman," said the magistrate, sternly, "when you were first brought before me, your tender years and —well, yes—your refined looks, rather inclined me to think too leniently of your case, and to criticise too hastily the course of your accuser. The wickedness with which you have endeavoured to shield yourself by criminating a gentleman of Dr. Horne's unimpeachable character has convinced me that you are one with whom it will not do to deal gently. The evidence against you is also convicting, and obliges me to bind you over for trial to appear at the assizes. Have you bail?"

"Sir?" asked Alice, lifting her now pale face from her hands.

"I ask you, have you bail!"

"I do not understand you, sir," said the poor girl, to whom the forms of law were incomprehensible.

The magistrate explained what was needed.

For a moment her face brightened. She thought of her lover, and how readily he would become her surety; but the beam was very transient; it passed away as she resolved to refrain from mentioning his name, lest the unmerited shame that had fallen upon her should be reflected upon him.

"I have no bail," she answered.

"Have you really no friend to whom you could apply in this emergency?" inquired the magistrate, who, against what he considered his "better judgment," was again beginning to pity her.

"I have none to whom I would be willing to apply, sir."

"Then you know what follows; I shall be obliged to commit you to prison."

A low, despairing cry broke from Alice, as again she dropped her face upon her hands.

"Take courage; some friend may voluntarily come forward to-morrow to help you," said the squire, as he made out the committal.

Alice did not speak or look up again, but remained

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

with her face buried in her hands until the magistrate had put the warrant in the hands of the constable, and he had touched her shoulder, saying—

"Come, young woman, the sooner you get under shelter now the better."

But again one of those failing moods came over her, and losing all her strength, she sank to the floor. At first this was treated as an affectation, and the stern voice of the magistrate commanded the constable—

"Set her upon her feet and take her away! She is only acting!"

But when that officer attempted to obey, he found her white and cold, and rigid as marble. Restoratives were resorted to. Kneeling beside her, the constable rubbed her forehead, temples, and the palms of her hands with hartshorn, while the magistrate produced from his private cupboard a little good brandy, kept for such emergencies, and forced a teaspoonful into her mouth. These powerful means at length aroused her, so that she was able to be lifted upon her feet, and conducted between the two constables to the chaise.

A very short drive took them to the prison gates.

Old Mr. Wardour was summoned, and the warrant put in his hands.

"And here is your prisoner," said the constable, lifting her from the chaise and placing her, half-dying, upon her feet.

He had to start and catch her to keep her from falling.

"She has a habit of fainting," said the officer, as he half supported and half dragged her towards the door of the jail.

"She has a habit of dying, I think, to look at her; let me help her, Mr. McNab; you hurt her. One needn't be a brute because one's a constable, need he? Come, child, cheer up! Peter and Paul were put in prison afore ever you were, and they sung hymns all night; and there's many a one has entered these walls sorrowing as has gone out rejoicing," said the good-hearted jailer, as he gently supported the steps of the falling girl into the little office, where the preliminaries

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

of the prisoner's reception were settled, and the constable dismissed.

"And now, my dear, I am going to put you in good company; in a cell in the upper lobby, near Mr. Maraudey and Mr. Mostyn. You know, my dear, that strong as circumstances was agin him, it's thought now as how he was innocent. And as for Mrs. Mostyn—she is just an angel, and if there is any created being higher than an angel, or an archangel, she is just that! She'll be a comfort to you, my dear," said the jailer, as he drew the arm of Alice within his own, and carrying a light in his hand, supported her up the stairs and along the upper lobby.

As they passed between the row of dark and vacant cells, they saw lights gleaming from the two opposite ones at the extreme end of the lobby.

"That on the right is Mr. Mostyn's; that on the left is Mr. Maraudey's. It is rather a genteel ward this, my dear; I shall put you the very next to the priest's, and right acróss from Mr. Mostyn's, so that you won't feel lonesome," said Mr. Wardour, unlocking the described cell and conducting his prisoner in.

It was a narrow space from wall to wall, but very well scrubbed and white-washed. A still narrower bed, with coarse, clean bedding; a little stove, a stand, and a chair completed the furniture.

"Now, say your prayers and go to bed, like a good girl. If you have done *wrong*, ask the Lord to *forgive* you; if you *haven't*, ask Him to *deliver* you; he'll do 'ither. Good-night, and God bless you, child," said the jailer, shutting the door, and softly turning the key.

He then took a step further that brought him opposite to Mr. Maraudey's cell; he peeped through the grating and saw the old man on his knees before a crucifix.

"That's all very well," said the jailer to himself—"but it would be a heap better if you'd only give up the name of that malefactor, as Mr. Mostyn is a sufferin' for!"

Having delivered himself of this sentiment, the worthy jailer crossed the lobby to Gerald Mostyn's cell.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

CHAPTER XXX.

ALICE IN PRISON.

HE could not peep into this cell, for a white muslin curtain, the work of Constance's fingers, was drawn across the door, as well to keep off the idle gaze of those without, as to hide the ugly grating from the eyes of him within.

But Mr. Wardour rapped.

"Come in, good friend," said the sweet voice of the lady, as she recognized the rap of the jailer. He opened the door and entered.

The cell had quite changed its aspect since the respite of Mr. Mostyn.

Constance had said cheerfully that since he was destined to lodge there for an indefinite period, it behoved her to make the little nook habitable. With the permission of the proper authorities, who could not refuse a lady so harmless a favour, she had had the cell thoroughly cleaned and whitewashed. The narrow floor was covered with a strip of neat carpet; a small, neat bedstead, with a spring mattress, clean linen and woollen coverings, and a warm counterpane, was placed in one corner; an imported coal-stove in another; a small stand with toilet fixtures in a third; and an easy-chair, covered with crimson cloth, nearly filled the remaining space. Little crimson merino and white muslin curtains concealed the bars of both the window and the door. On the wall opposite the bed three little hanging shelves supported a small collection of books. Each side, and also above this shelf, hung three small prints—that on the left, the Crucifixion—that on the right, the Resurrection—that above, the Ascension.

If any caviller object that these comforts were unbefitting the place and the occasion, let such an one know that since the half-disclosures of the priest that had necessitated the indefinite respite of the prisoner, the rigour of the prison discipline had, by the order of the authorities, been somewhat relaxed in his behalf.

And besides, to obtain these things for him, Constance

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

had sacrificed a personal ornament and convenience—her diamond-studded gold watch—whose price had paid for the fitting up and furnishing of the cell.

By the kind sufferance of the jailer, Constance now spent much time, evening as well as morning, in her husband's cell.

When Mr. Wardour, in compliance with her request, now entered, he found Mr. Mostyn seated upon the side of his bedstead, reading to Constance, who, occupying the only chair, was engaged in some delicate needle-work. A safety-lamp sitting upon the little stand sufficiently lighted the cell.

Mr. Mostyn immediately laid aside his book, and invited his visitor to accept the only seat he could offer him—the foot of the bed.

"I thank you, no, sir; I came only to speak to madam. There is a poor girl in the opposite cell, whom I do wish you would have the charity to look after, madam; for I don't know but she'll die all alone this night."

"Who is she?" inquired Constance, looking up from her sewing.

"Alice Owen, the very girl as was the principal witness against your husband, although I'm here asking you to see after her, knowing as how you return good for evil."

"Alice Owen! in the name of all that is incomprehensible, how came she hither?" exclaimed Constance, in amazement, while Mr. Mostyn looked and listened with fixed attention.

"Well, ma'am, if it wasn't retribution, I don't know what else it could have been, poor thing!"

"Retribution?"

"Yes, ma'am. How came your husband here? Circumstantial evidence supported by Miss Alice Owen's testimony, and she all the while mistaken. And how comes *she* here? circumstantial evidence again, supported by Dr. Horne's testimony, and he all the while mistaken, as I'll be bound to say, for if that young lady is not innocent, then I'm not such a judge of faces

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

as I ought to be, seeing as I've had such a long experience."

"But of what, then, is the poor girl accused?" inquired Mr. Mostyn.

"Theft, sir; grand larceny, sir; that which will send her to prison for ten years, sir, if its proved against her."

"Good heaven!" exclaimed both Gerald and Constance, in a breath.

"Yes, sir—yes, ma'am, that is it; the poor thing seems perfectly stupefied by her condition. Ma'am, if you would take a look at her before you go, and as soon as you come in the morning, it would be a charity."

"I will certainly do so," said Constance.

"I thank you from my heart, dear lady, and if anything should be wanted—for I don't know but she is ill—you can call Tom Turner, who is at the other end of this lobby, and send for me."

"I promise you," said Constance. And with this pledge the good jailer departed.

After a little conversation between the husband and wife upon the subject of Alice's arrest, Constance rapped for Tom Turner to let her out, and crossed the lobby to the girl's cell. Looking through the grating, she dimly saw Alice sitting on the side of her cot, with her hands clasped upon her knees, and her eyes wildly staring into vacancy.

Constance rapped and called softly—

"Alice—Alice Owen."

"Who wants me?" answered the poor girl, in a trembling voice.

"Your friend, Mrs. Mostyn. May I come in and see you?"

"As you please, lady."

Tom Turner softly turned the key, and Constance entered, and sitting down beside Alice, silently embraced and kissed her.

For the first time since her sudden arrest, Alice burst into tears, and dropping her head upon the lady's shoulder, wept sorely.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Constance gently soothed her with tender caresses and comforting words, until at length Alice recovered her power of speech, and between choking sobs, exclaimed—

"You—you come to me in prison, lady; you embrace me, and kiss me, and console me—me who swore away your husband's life!"

"No, poor Alice, you did *not*. 'God took that on Him.' My husband has been respited, and will be saved and fully vindicated. I should be a heathen to believe else."

"Ah! but then I swore away his life none the less because it was not sacrificed. Ah. lady—sweet lady! how can you endure the sight of me, much less forgive me, and come to me, and caress and comfort me?"

"Because, poor Alice, neither myself nor my honoured husband can be so unjust as to blame you for that testimony, or so unfeeling as not to compassionate your present condition. Your evidence, poor girl, was given most reluctantly, as every one saw."

"Oh, it was—indeed it was! I tried to escape the subpœna."

"We know that; we also know that since yesterday I begin to believe that I *might* have been mistaken?"

"And we *know* that you were so, dear Alice; but what, then, has raised the doubt in your mind?"

"Just this, madam—my own condition. Lady, look at me. I, even I, stand committed here upon a charge of grand larceny, supported by proof that must inevitably convict and send me to prison, unless some miracle of Divine Providence should intervene. The testimony that convicted Mr. Mostyn was not stronger than that which will convict me; and yet I am as innocent of felony as the babe unborn, and so, also, I begin to think Mr. Mostyn may well be, notwithstanding the testimony."

"And he is, dear girl, he is; and his innocence shall yet shine forth as the sun at noon-day. But tell me, Alice, the circumstances that led to your arrest."

"Lady, I will; but before I begin the strange, sorrowful, shameful story, it is but fair to tell you that I can

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

bring no proof whatever of its authenticity, and that it received no credit whatever at the office of the magistrate. Therefore you must reject or receive it, lady, only on my own assertion."

"Alice, I have not now to learn for the first time, that truth may lack corroborative proof, while falsehood may be supported by a mass of circumstantial evidence, as in my husband's case. Go on, child, tell your story."

Alice commenced and related the history of Dr. Horne's sinful love and criminal addresses to herself; her terror, loathing, and rejecting of his suit; his disappointment, rage, and threats of vengeance; her departure from his house, and her arrival at the parsonage; the appearance of the police-officers with the search-warrant, and the finding of the jewels in her trunk; finally, of her arrest, trial, and commitment to prison.

Constance listened with ever-increasing horror and amazement; and when Alice had concluded her story, the lady remained in deep and silent thought.

"There, madam, there are the facts, unsustained by proof; I know not whether you can credit the statement," said the poor maiden, hesitatingly.

"Alice, yes, at least I credit your sincerity. I have no doubt you fully believe what you tell me, but I know not what to make of it."

"Ah, you do not believe me," wept Alice.

"Yes, I do, my poor girl; that is, I believe in your innocence and truthfulness. I have never known Dr. Horne intimately enough to have any personal knowledge of his character; but for years I have known him by reputation as a man of indubitable integrity—of unimpeachable honour—and, therefore, I hope there may be some great error in this affair that investigation may rectify. And yet, recollecting the facts, I feel there could have been no mistake either. You could not have imagined his wicked wooing and his threats, nor could he have fancied you to have been guilty of the sins of which he has accused you. Either you or he, therefore, are deeply guilty! Looking in your face, dear Alice, I must have more light and better counsel

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

upon this subject before I can give you any advice, except this—pray."

But instead of praying, Alice bitterly wept.

Mrs. Mostyn gently assisted to undress the suffering girl, constrained her to lie down on the bed, and sat beside her, until anxiety succumbed to exhaustion, and Alice slept. Then Constance softly withdrew and left the prison.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

WHILE these events were transpiring in the jail, Dr. Heath, riding at full speed, entered the village, nor drew rein until he reached the magistrate's office. But it was closed up and darkened.

He alighted, walked up to the principal entrance of the dwelling-house, and knocked loudly.

A footman in livery opened the door.

"Has your master retired?" inquired the doctor.

"No, sir; but——" and the footman paused in evident embarrassment.

"Then take him my card, and say I *entreat* him to favour me with a short interview," urged the doctor.

"Yes, sir; but——, and the servant again hesitated.

"But do my errand, friend," insisted Dr. Heath, slipping a crown into the hand of the man, an argument that never yet failed with that functionary, who bowed and disappeared within the house.

Dr. Heath remained anxiously waiting at the door until the footman returned, inviting the visitor to follow him, and led the way to a door at the extremity of the hall, which he opened, announcing—

"Dr. Heath."

The young doctor found himself in an elegantly-furnished and well-lighted library, where the worthy magistrate, in dressing-gown and slippers, reposed himself in an easy-chair, before a glowing coal fire, and

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

beside a luxurious table, lazily enjoying his solitary bachelor supper.

He slowly arose as his visitor entered, saying, as he held out his hand—

"Welcome, Frank! May I be sent to everlasting perdition if I would have admitted another human being to my privacy to-night, excepting only yourself! And if my knave of a servant had so much as brought any other card but yours, it should have cost the rascal his place! For this is an hour that I reserve for quiet repose! What the demon! do you think that I should have been a bachelor at this time of my life if I had not loved quiet evenings more than anything else in the world? Consequently, I have told my knaves that they may rob me, deceive me, slander me, and do all else of evil to me that orthodox servants feel it their duty to do to their masters, but if they love their places and their shins, they are never to admit a visitor, or bring me a card after eight o'clock in the evening; and all I wonder at is, that Johnson should have dared to bring me one to-night! Faith! but it was well for the rascal that it bore your name; for you're an old friend, Frank, and an old friend is like an old shoe—wondrous easy. Come, draw up another chair; you haven't supped, I know; and I will enjoy my supper as a duet instead of a solo. Here! Johnson, you hanged malefactor! another plate, knife and fork, and glass! and if ever you dare to bring me another card while I am at supper, unless it bears the name of Dr. Heath, I'll——" The magistrate paused, and left the penalty to the imagination of the culprit, who hastily withdrew to obey orders.

The magistrate now turned his regards upon Dr. Heath, who all this time had remained standing, and exclaimed—

"Come, man! come, man! Sit down! sit down! What are ye waiting for? Did you hear me say you are welcome? And when Jessup *says* welcome, he *means* welcome!" concluded the magistrate, placing a second chair at the table, with an emphatic thump, and motioning the young man to take it.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Mr. Jessup," said Dr. Heath, still standing, "pray excuse me if I must decline your hospitality. The errand upon which I come admits of no delay. Nothing, in short, but the most urgent necessity would have compelled me to break in upon your evening's repose. But your worship——"

"Oh, Lord! it is business, after all!" interrupted the magistrate, in dismay. 'Business at this time of night!' 'Necessity, and my worship!' I tell you, sir, that there is no necessity at this hour except that of rest and refreshment. And as for me, I am never 'worshipful' after eight o'clock in the evening. I am only tired and hungry—aye, as the poorest poacher I ever sent to prison. And this particular day I had a d——l of a case on my hands—that of a young girl charged with grand larceny. A loving looking creature, too! as beautiful as an angel, and as corrupt as——"

The magistrate paused, as was his frequent wont, and left the conclusion to the speculations of his hearer.

"Mr. Jessup, it is of that most unhappy, but most innocent maiden, that I come to speak to you," said the young man, very gravely.

"Eh! what!" exclaimed the justice, in surprise; "then I listen, though it were eighteen o'clock instead of eight! but sit down, man, sit down. I'm condemned if I lose my supper, or eat it alone either, with you looking on, for any man or woman—guilty or innocent—in Christendom or Heathenland! Come; we can talk while we eat," said he, pointing peremptorily to the second chair, while he resumed his own.

Dr. Heath took the indicated seat.

At that moment the footman entered with the additional service.

"There, you unindicted felon! set down the plates and glasses, and be off with yourself," said the magistrate. "And now, Frank," he continued, as the servant disappeared, "what about this girl, whose woful young face has haunted me all the evening?"

"I would ask you, sir, first, what has been the result of her examination?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"I was obliged to commit her to prison for the lack of bail."

"Good heaven! what was the evidence against this most injured and most unfortunate girl?" inquired Dr. Heath.

"Strong—very strong! the testimony of her late employer, who swore to many acts of petty theft on her part before this fatal crime of grand larceny."

"A fabrication; an infamous fabrication, sir!" exclaimed the young man, indignantly.

"Come, come, Frank, that is going too far. Why should a gentleman of Dr. Horne's character and reputation fabricate such a story, and perjure himself besides?"

"I do not say that *he* did it, but some one in his employment, who envied the high position Miss Owen held in every one's esteem, has slandered her to him! And I blame him severely for listening to such stories, and *most* severely for charging, upon such slight grounds, a most innocent young girl with so base a crime as theft! Oh! but he shall render an account for it!" said the young man, starting up and walking the floor in an excited manner.

"Sit down, sit down, Frank. You fidget me with your tantrums," said Mr. Jessup. And then, as Dr. Heath resumed his seat, he continued—

"Slight grounds! What do you call slight grounds? The stolen property was found in her trunk!"

Dr. Heath made a gesture of impatience, exclaiming—

"There is some mistake in it. Perhaps Mrs. Horne, who loves Alice, might have given her the jewels; and in the present state of her health is not able to acknowledge her own deed."

"Pooh! give away jewels worth fifteen hundred pounds to her young nurse without even consulting her husband? Preposterous! Besides, the girl herself never entered such a plea as that."

"Still there is some mistake. There must be some mistake, since it is utterly out of the question that Alice Owen could have been guilty of theft," insisted the young doctor.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Nonsense! But I see how it is; you were the attendant physician of Mrs. Horne, and were necessarily thrown much in the society of her pretty young nurse, whose dark eyes have made some impression upon you as—yes, I will confess it—they did upon me. It was difficult to believe anything evil of a face so lovely. Your dark-eyed beauties are so bewitching! But I am sorry to say that the girl's guilt seems too well proven. The fact is, Frank, the young creature is as beautiful as a houri, and she knows it; and she naturally likes to enhance the effect of her beauty by ornament. Alas! my young friend, of all the women brought before me in my capacity of magistrate, and whom I have been obliged to commit to prison, ninety-nine out of a hundred have been ruined by a love of dress which they were unable honestly to gratify. He would be the greatest public benefactor who could convince women that dress, beyond its original purpose of decently covering the body, is of no manner of use; or if the passion for ornament is too deeply impressed upon the female heart ever to be eradicated, he would be a still greater philanthropist who could find means to persuade the government to provide the female race with finery to their heart's content at the public expenditure. Heaven knows, I believe it would be a saving in the end," said the squire, washing down the sentiment with a huge bumper of claret.

Dr. Heath was about to reply, when the magistrate forestalled him by adding—

"Now, this girl, she knows she is beautiful, as I said before; and she knows that she would wear pearls with as much grace as any countess in the kingdom. Her mistress is ill, the jewel casket is in her way, vanity and opportunity are too strong for her honesty, and she appropriates the pearls which she thinks would grace so well her own dark hair: and you see the fatal result. Bah! my young friend, it is a common case. Take your wine."

"It may be a common case, sir, but it is not the case with Alice Owen. My life, my soul on her innocence!" said Francis Heath, while the tears started to his manly

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

eyes, as he thought of poor, gentle Alice, in her prison cell.

"Pooh, pooh, my young friend! if you had been a magistrate thirty years, as I have been, you would have more experience in human frailty, and less faith in fair faces. But, seriously, Frank, your great interest in this erring girl begins to give me some anxiety. Your father and I were good friends, and I should be sorry that his son should be drawn into any—hum—ha—you understand me, Frank."

The generous blood mounted to the young man's face. His natural magnanimity prompted him at once to announce his engagement with the beautiful and unfortunate Alice, and had he himself alone been concerned, he would instantly have acknowledged his betrothal; but prudence immediately suggested that this would only draw him into a long and embarrassing controversy with the old friend of his father, which would seriously delay and impede the progress of any service he might be able to render Alice. He replied, evasively—

"I understand you, sir, and I hope you will rest satisfied with the assurance that my interest in this young lady arises from no improper or unchristian motives. I have known her long and most favourably, and I would pledge my own honour for her spotless integrity. She is an orphan, destitute alike of money or friends. I came hither with the purpose of serving her in the best manner that I may."

"And what do you wish to do, then?"

"To offer bail for her appearance at court. You know my responsibility, I suppose, and will not object to take me for any sum that may be necessary—aye! to the whole extent of my property, if required."

"Pooh," said the magistrate, "much less than that will do. I will have her brought up again to-morrow, when you can enter into a recognizance for her appearance at the assizes."

"But to-night—cannot the business be concluded to-night?" inquired the young man, anxiously.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"At this hour? Preposterous! impossible!" replied the justice in a tone that admitted of no dispute.

"And must the unhappy girl spend the night in prison, then?" inquired the young man.

"Certainly, there is no possible way of helping it. Why, the prison has been closed up for hours."

"Then at least you will appoint an early hour of the morning for releasing her upon my recognizance?" urged Francis Heath, as he arose to take his leave.

"Cannot do that either, I am sorry to say, my young friend. I have to meet some brother magistrates at nine o'clock, and shall be occupied with them for two or three hours, after which, however, I shall be able to attend to your wishes. And as a parting advice, I counsel you not to become too deeply interested in the young girl you wish to serve. A pretty girl is a dangerous sort of a *protége* for a gentleman," said the magistrate, as he arose, to dismiss his visitor.

With an agreement to meet the magistrate at twelve o'clock the next day, Frank took leave and departed from the house.

He found his horse, that had been refreshed by a feed and a rest, held by a groom at the gate.

Throwing the man a half-crown, he got into his saddle, and turned his horse's head down the street.

He passed the dark and massive front of the jail on the other side of the way, and his heart bled to think of Alice a prisoner within its gloomy walls.

Late as it was, he set out upon the road leading back to the parsonage.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE EFFECT OF SUSPICION.

THE way was long and difficult, and day was dawning behind the eastern mountains, when Francis Heath drew rein at the gates of the parsonage.

The household was too well used to the irregular hours that his profession obliged the young physician to keep to be surprised at his very early arrival.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

He was let in by his own servant, who attended him to his room, where he merely refreshed himself by his usual morning ablutions, and by a cup of coffee, and then repaired to the library to await the rising of his sister.

Mrs. Osborne, a careful housewife, was an habitual early riser, and this morning, having a busy day before her in anticipation of the bishop's visit, she was up earlier than usual.

Hearing from the servants that her brother had got home at daybreak, and was waiting to see her in the library, she repaired thither.

On opening the door, she was so struck with the pale, worn, and anxious expression of his countenance, that, forgetting for the moment all other anxieties, she exclaimed—

"Francis, you will kill yourself. You have spent the whole night on horseback, and ridden to Gwyn and back since tea-time yesterday."

"My dear sister, you do not inquire about poor Alice," said the young man.

"Yes, I do; I have not slept a wink all night for thinking of her—and of the bishop's visit. What about her? Where have you left her?"

"In the county jail," he replied, gravely.

"In the county jail," she exclaimed, turning very pale, sinking into a chair, and gazing in great dismay upon the face of her brother.

"Yes, in the county jail."

"Oh, Heavens, what a misfortune! and what a mortification to all her friends. Have you seen her?"

"No, the examination was over before I reached the magistrate's office, and the much-injured girl had been fully committed to take her trial at the assizes."

Mrs. Osborne gazed in terror and distress upon the anxious face of her brother, but made no comment.

"But I have seen the magistrate," resumed Dr. Heath, "and had a long interview with him."

"What did he think of her case?" faltered Mrs. Osborne.

"What he thought of her case is shown in his act.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

He committed her to prison. Magistrates always act upon evidence rather than character."

"And what can be done for the poor girl?"

"Nothing before eleven o'clock to-day. I offered bail last night, but it was too late for anything to be done. I appointed to meet the magistrate at eleven o'clock to enter into a recognizance with poor Alice for her appearance at court. Then I rode off hither to tell you the result, as well as to send a bottle of medicine to Mrs. Horton, whom I shall not be able to visit."

"But you are really not in earnest in riding back to Gwyn this morning?"

"Most certainly I shall keep my appointment with the magistrate. I will not leave poor Alice in prison one moment longer than I can possibly help."

"But your horse must be quite exhausted as well as yourself;" expostulated his sister.

"I shall take my new horse, Hassan; he will carry me there in a couple of hours."

"It's a pity but that you had a new body, as well as a new horse, at need! You'll kill yourself."

"No danger of that, sister; it is mental anxiety, and not fatigue, that makes me ill. As soon as I see Alice at liberty I shall be well, and not till then. The sooner she is released the sooner I shall be myself."

The shade of a new anxiety crossed the brow of Mrs. Osborne.

"And when she is released upon your recognizance, what can you do with her?" she inquired, somewhat excitedly.

"Why, bring her here, of course. What else should I do with her?" said Dr. Heath, looking up in surprise.

"Bring her here! Oh no, Frank, that would never, never do, you know!" said the lady, with a shudder.

"But I thought this was to be her home—until I should be able to provide her with another. It was your own proposal!" said the young physician, in surprise and vexation.

"Yes, Frank, but that was before this shocking affair took place. That was when no one could say any thing against her character, whatever they might say

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

against her birth and position. And I did it, Frank, for your sake. But if you wish me to be perfectly candid with you, I never did quite approve of your marrying Alice Owen; though, as she was amiable and accomplished, I was inclined to look over the objection of her low birth; and as you were resolved to marry her, I invited her here, so that she might not discredit the connection by taking another situation. And I treated her with affection, and tried to like her—not a difficult task, for she seemed the sweetest creature I ever saw. That I admit; but of course all that is over now. You could never think of keeping your engagement with her, and discrediting your family by marrying a girl that has been accused of theft? Nor can *I*, a clergyman's wife, consent to receive her here again," said Mrs. Osborne, excitedly, while avoiding the fixed, rebuking glance, of her true-hearted brother.

"Sister, how can you be so unfeeling as to desert an innocent, unhappy girl, a poor, friendless, homeless orphan, in the time of her bitterest need?" he inquired, in a voice trembling with emotion.

"I am not unfeeling," said Mrs. Osborne, with the tears swelling to her eyes. "I am not unfeeling. I am sure I am as sorry for Alice as I can possibly be. I think it quite right that you should bail her out of prison. I would do that much for her myself, if needful: but what more can I do? I cannot have her here. My husband is a clergyman, and is about to receive a visit from his bishop—and—but you must see for yourself the thing is quite impossible. Mr. Osborne has already lost ground in his parish by showing more interest in young Mostyn than the people think he ought to take in any convict: and now you want to bring Alice Owen upon him. Why, people will think that we have got irrecoverably mixed up with a set of felons!" said the lady with a shiver.

"But poor Alice is no felon. She is yet unconvicted. And you should know, in your heart, that she is perfectly innocent."

"I believe she is innocent—that is, I *hope* she is innocent—and I hope it will be proved so; but, after

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

all, what can I *know* of it? The magistrate is wiser than I am, and he believed her guilty, and committed her for trial. And, after all, innocent or guilty, the stigma of her arrest and trial for theft will cleave to her and all connected with her for ever, and you know it; and you know that I cannot, upon that account, receive her at the parsonage again. And if I could, Mr. Osborne would not."

"Sister, you know that your husband will consent to anything you wish."

"Then the greater reason why I should not ask him to consent to anything that might injure him as a clergyman," said the lady.

"Then you absolutely refuse to shelter this innocent and most injured girl?"

"I am absolutely *forced* to do so, from my sense of duty," said Mrs. Osborne. "But——"

"That will do," said her brother, rising.

"Nay, but listen to me, Frank. Anything else that I can do for the poor girl I will very cheerfully undertake. Let me know if I can serve her in any other way. And, Frank, as soon as you have released her from prison, and placed her in some humble, decent home, where the people may not object to receive her, let me implore you to break with her at once, for even Alice herself cannot expect you to marry her after what has happened; and if you will do this, and then come and let me know, I will go to see her myself, and do all that a clergyman's wife may do for her comfort."

"I thank you, Mrs. Osborne, but perhaps, as a clergyman's wife, you had better not sully your sacred robes by coming too near the victim of such deep misfortunes."

"Now, you are unreasonably angry, Frank. But I am really interested in the fate of the poor girl, though I could not possibly receive her as an inmate of my family; and I am very anxious that when she is released from prison, and while she is awaiting her trial, she should be properly taken care of," urged the lady, in full sincerity.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Give yourself no uneasiness upon Alice Owen's account, Mrs. Osborne. For, once out of prison, as I hope to see her in a few hours, she shall not want either a safe home or an honourable protection," said the young man, coldly and firmly.

"Now, Frank, whenever you look so grim you mean mischief. Now, what do you intend to do?" inquired his sister, in great alarm.

"Release Alice Owen, to begin with," replied Dr. Heath, seizing his hat, and abruptly leaving the room to order his horse.

His sister hurried after him into the passage, but no entreaties could induce Francis Heath either to stop for the family breakfast or give any further explanation of his purpose.

"No, no, Mrs. Osborne; it is in vain to urge me; the roof that has refused to shelter an innocent girl in her utmost extremity, shall not cover the head of Francis Heath for another hour. My new office and dwelling at Gwyn is nearly ready for occupation. I should have removed thither in the spring, at all events, and even now the half-finished house may serve me at a crisis."

And waiting only long enough to despatch his servant with the potion for Mrs. Horton, Dr. Heath threw himself into his saddle, and galloped rapidly towards Gwyn, where he arrived about nine o'clock. There remained about two hours before he could meet Alice at the magistrate's office. His first care was, therefore, to have his horse put up at the village hotel.

He next paid a visit to the office of the registrar, where he transacted some business, of which more anon.

And, finally, he went over the way to the modest village house that he had engaged as his office and bachelor dwelling, and directed the old woman who was in charge there to open and air the rooms.

When these preliminaries had been arranged, as it was now a quarter to twelve o'clock, he bent his steps towards the prison to visit Alice and accompany her to the magistrate's office to arrange for her release.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A MARRIAGE BY LICENSE.

MR. WARDOUR saw him from the window of his own dwelling, and, ignorant of his relation to Alice Owen, but thinking that he had come to see Mr. Mostyn, hastened to admit him.

"Come in, sir; your friend is alone, I suppose, or if not, you can wait in the office until he is ready to receive you," he said, as he let down bar and shoved back bolt to open the portals for his visitor.

"I thank you," said Francis Heath, as he walked beside the jailer towards the prison, "it is not Mr. Mostyn that I wish to see first, but a young creature whom you received here last night."

"Oh, yes, sir, that poor child! Well, just wait in the office a moment, until I go and see whether she is prepared to receive a visitor," said the jailer, showing the young man into the appointed place, and starting off to do his errand.

"An instant, Mr. Wardour, if you please. It is proper, since I make this visit, to inform you that the young lady, who is to be its recipient, is my own betrothed wife. Having said this much, I need not add that she is entirely guiltless of that which is falsely and cruelly laid to her charge," said the loyal-hearted young man, as he detained the jailer for a few seconds to hear this explanation.

"Really, sir, I believed her innocent from the first! and indeed people ought to be made to suffer for bringing groundless charges," said the jailer, as he hastened away.

After an absence of five minutes, he returned, saying—

"You can come up now, sir. I found Mrs. Mostyn with her when I first went up, but now the lady has retired, and the girl is alone. Follow me, sir."

Francis Heath obeyed, and the jailer conducted him to the upper lobby, and to the door of Alice's cell, where he left him.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

When he entered, he found her sitting upon the side of her cot, her head dropped upon her bosom, her hands clasped upon her lap, and her eyes fixed upon the floor.

"Alice! dearest Alice!"

She started up impulsively; he caught her in his arms and pressed her to his faithful heart.

"My own dear Alice! my own deeply-injured love! How pale and faint you are. Courage, sweet girl, you shall not stay here one hour longer; your wrongs shall all be righted. Sweet girl, look up," said Francis, gently caressing her.

From very faintness only, she still lay in his arms, her head drooping on his shoulder.

"Poor dove! this has almost killed you. But cheer up, my best beloved, you are not the first innocent one, by many thousands, that has been falsely accused. Cheer up, my own dear Alice!" continued her lover, striving by the tenderest words and gentlest caresses, to assuage her grief and restore her courage.

Still some moments longer, for very weakness, she rested in his arms and leaned upon his shoulder; then, with a feeble attempt to free herself, she faltered—

"Put me away, Francis. See you not the prison blot is on me, and guilty or innocent, it will cling to me, it will cleave to me, for ever and for ever. But you must not share the stigma; put me away!"

"Alice," he said, in a tone of gentle reproach, "I never was guilty of a dishonourable act in all my life; would you, my betrothed, be the first to counsel me to one?"

"I counsel you to save yourself, and to leave me to the fate which you cannot avert," said the unhappy girl, with a certain gentle firmness.

"Then you counsel me to a most dishonourable course. Alice, need I tell you that I know you to be innocent?"

"Innocent? Yes, I am innocent! God knows that I am so," said the orphan, clasping her hands, and raising her swimming eyes to heaven in the earnestness of her asseveration.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"And I know it, Alice, as I said before; and knowing this, I have neither the will nor the power to leave you 'to your fate.'"

"But, alas! you would sacrifice yourself without saving me. I am doomed, Francis; no power on earth can avert my destruction. There is evidence enough to convict me a thousand times over. Nothing but a miracle could save me!"

"Then a miracle will save you. Listen, Alice—'Innocence is the peculiar care of Providence;' trust to that alone. You will be cleared. Look at Mr. Mostyn. A miracle almost it was that intervened to save him!"

"But is he saved? Alas, he is still under sentence of death!"

"He is saved. That sentence will never be executed."

"Heaven grant it may be so," said the generous girl, almost losing sight of her own calamity in sympathy for another's.

"Amen," said the young man, fervently.

And before another word could be spoken they were interrupted by the entrance of the jailer and a constable, who came to conduct Alice Owen before the magistrate to enter into a recognizance with her surety, for her appearance before the criminal court.

Alice put on her little black bonnet and shawl, and turned to follow her guides.

But Dr. Heath drew her arm within his own, and, guarded by the constables, led her from the prison cell, down through the lobby and the staircase, and out into the open air.

"Now, dear one, you have taken your leave of those gloomy walls forever; and not for one moment should you have abided within them could I have reached here in time to have become your surety last night," said Francis Heath, as, attended by the officer, they crossed the street and then entered the magistrate's office.

Mr. Jessup was in his chair, attended only by his clerk.

He greeted Dr. Heath half kindly, half frowningly,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

and bade him and his charge be seated, while the bond of bail was made out. Alice, trembling violently, and keeping her veil closely drawn before her face, sat down to await the issue. As soon as the paper was ready, they were summoned to affix their signatures to the bond, and the business was complete. And the magistrate signified that the prisoner and her surety were at liberty to withdraw.

"Come, my dear Alice," whispered Francis Heath, as he drew her arm within his own and led her from the office.

Alice looked up in his face with an expression of helpless, hopeless misery, that seemed to ask—

"What shall I do? Whither can I go?"

There was a close carriage standing at the corner of the street, apparently awaiting orders. Dr. Heath made a signal to the coachman, and the carriage immediately advanced and drew up before the office. Dr. Heath opened the door, and holding it open, he said—

"'Get in, dear Alice, and I will explain afterwards."

Alice with an appealing gaze of utter helplessness and perfect trust, obeyed.

Dr. Heath paused a moment to direct the coachman, in a low voice, to drive to Gwyn Old Church, that was situated in the eastern suburbs of the town, and then entered the carriage and took his seat beside Alice.

They rode on in silence for a few minutes, Dr. Heath apparently plunged in deep thought, and Alice watching his countenance in anxious affection. At last she summoned courage to ask—

"Where are you taking me, Dr. Heath? Not back to the parsonage I hope. Oh, no! I should but be an embarrassment to your dear sister."

"No, sweet Alice, I am not taking you back to the parsonage. It is full of company by this time, drawn together to meet the bishop, and no place for my 'stricken deer,'" replied Francis Heath, tenderly.

"Where, then; where, then, are you taking me, Dr. Heath? Ah, do not embarrass yourself with one so utterly and irretrievably lost as myself. Listen. I have

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

thirty shillings left. For that money some poor cottager might receive me for the few days that must intervene before my trial—and then—" She paused and grew pale.

"And then, Alice, what then?" asked the young man, tenderly taking her hand.

"The Lord will take care of the rest," she said, in a low and reverent tone.

"He will: but he works by human means, sweet girl. Listen to me, my love. Alice, you have neither father nor mother, sister nor brother, nor even uncle, aunt, or cousin. You are a desolate and helpless orphan. You have no friend but myself, your lover. Dear Alice, this is no hour, indeed, for false scruples, and what I wish to say is this—that you must immediately give me a husband's right to protect you."

"Francis, you do not mean it?" exclaimed the orphan, thrilled to the heart.

"I mean, dearest Alice, that within this hour you must become my wife!"

"Francis! Francis! would you indeed thus devote yourself to a lost and wretched girl like me?"

"I would devote myself to a much-injured and innocent maiden, whom I love from the depths of my heart."

"Oh, my knight! my royal-hearted knight! would you even ruin yourself for me?" she exclaimed, trembling with mixed emotions of joy and grief, admiration and gratitude.

"There will be no ruin, dear girl. Alice, I have faith in the Lord. I walk by faith, and not by sight. Knowing you to be innocent, I feel it to be my duty as well as my inclination to stand by you. To do this blamelessly I must become your husband, and that within this hour."

"Oh, Francis! Francis? it is almost worth while to be in such a desperate strait to find so true a friend," said the orphan, in a voice vibrating with passionate earnestness.

"Actions speak louder than words," and more to the purpose, he continued; "and what I have said to you in set terms, I must say to the world in more

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

significant acts. I have told you that I know you to be innocent. In a more practical manner I must tell the world so, by making you my wife."

"Oh, Francis! Francis! I thank you from my heart and soul for this most noble faith. But think you I would now link my wretched lot with yours? No. Francis, no! Do not ask me!"

"My own Alice, I have *not* asked you. I love you. I know that you love me. We were to have been married some future day. Necessity has hastened the effect. I have settled the question for us; and you, dear girl, must, in this particular, accept your fate from me," he said.

"Oh, Francis Heath, best and noblest friend! I cannot, ought not to burden you with my great misfortunes. It would be wrong! do not tempt me to do such wrong; I am not strong enough to resist; I have been so terrified and weakened; I am not fit to be your wife; I am but a poor, hunted, cowering hare, whose only wish is to creep away to some quiet spot and die in peace. Find me only such a place, good friend; then go and leave me to my fate," muttered Alice, in a voice vibrating with emotion, while the tears streamed down her face.

He gathered her tenderly to his bosom, wiped the tears from her eyes, stopped her further words with kisses, and laid her back among the cushions for a moment, while he searched in his pocket, and drew forth a paper, which he exhibited to her, saying—

"This, Alice is our marriage license. Before coming to you this morning, I went to the registrar's office and procured it; for I had resolved not to make my appearance before you without it. I then spoke to Mr. Miles, the curate, who officiates at Gwyn Old Church, to meet us there with his two sisters to act as witnesses to our marriage. They none of them know anything of you or your misfortunes, so that you need not shrink from seeing them."

By this time the carriage had drawn up before the entrance of the churchyard.

Dr. Heath alighted and handed out his companion,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

and drawing her arm within his own, led her into the church.

The curate, an old man, with thin, white hair, was already in his place, attended only by the parish clerk. Two elderly ladies, his sisters, were seated in a front pew, waiting to render the assistance required of them. These four persons were the only occupants of the church at the moment that Dr. Heath, with Alice Owen on his arm, entered the aisle.

He led his bride up before the altar, and named her to the curate and the two elderly ladies, who immediately joined the group.

The marriage ceremony commenced; the parish clerk gave away the bride, and at the close of the service the small party adjourned to the vestry to witness the registry of the marriage.

When these forms were over, the usual congratulations were tendered and accepted, the old curate was made happy in the possession of the largest fee he had ever received, Dr. Heath drew the arm of Alice within his own, and led her from the church.

He placed her in the carriage, stopped as before to direct the coachman where to drive, then entered and seated himself by her side.

"You are my own Alice, now, whose honour and reputation I will protect and defend against the whole world," he whispered, drawing her to his faithful bosom, upon which she dropped her young head, weeping strange tears of mingled sorrow and joy—sorrow at the remembrance of the dark fate that still threatened her, joy in the possession of the noble heart which had become her shelter.

A half-hour's drive brought them to the centre of the town. As they drove down the long street they passed the gloomy front of the prison from which Alice had been so recently released. She shuddered as she saw the building, and then, as if suddenly remembering the fact, she said—

"Oh, I did not take leave of Mrs. Mostyn, who was so good to me. Does she know?"

"She knows nothing as yet, dear Alice, but that you

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

have been released on bail; but before night she shall know everything, for I wish her to come to you as soon as may be," replied Dr. Heath.

The carriage passed on down the street, and drew up on the opposite side of the way, before a modest two-story stone house, having a central door, with a window each side, and three windows above. A small yard, filled with evergreen shrubbery, separated it from the street.

The doctor alighted, handed out Alice, and led her through the green wooden gate, and up to the house.

He knocked, and a matronly woman, neatly dressed, opened the door and curtsied.

"This is my wife, your mistress, Martin," said the doctor, as he led Alice in.

The woman curtsied again, opened a second door in the right side of the passage, and admitted them into a clean, cheerful, plainly-furnished parlour, where a bright fire glowed and a table was laid.

"You are so exhausted with all the excitement you have gone through—let me take your bonnet and shawl off here, dear Alice, and do you rest on this sofa until you have recovered yourself," said Dr. Heath, tenderly removing her wrappings, which he gave to the old servant, who took them from the room, and then drawing forward a soft sofa, upon which he persuaded her to repose for a few minutes while breakfast was brought out.

As soon as the servant was gone, he bent over her pale face, and kissing her tenderly, said—

"This is your home, dear Alice. Let me make you most welcome to it."

Alice blessed him with her soft, dark eyes, and then expressed some surprise that this 'home' should have been so ready for them.

"Sweet Alice, it is not half ready. There are but three rooms furnished in it—this parlour, a chamber immediately above it, and a kitchen behind it. There is not even accommodation for Martin, who is obliged to leave every night and return. She has a key to let herself into the kitchen. You must know that I took

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

the house just as it was given up by my predecessor, Mr. Thorpe, who sold me his medical practice here. He was an eccentric bachelor, who kept no company, and furnished no more rooms than were absolutely necessary to his own accommodation. His oddities made him unpopular, and his unpopularity made him hate the place. So he sold his small practice and his establishment here even below its value, and took himself and his eccentricities off to India. I hope to do better; to have a larger practice, as well as a better furnished house," said Francis Heath, smiling.

Martin now entered with coffee, toast, boiled eggs, broiled ham and chicken, which she neatly arranged upon the table.

Dr. Heath led Alice to the table, and selecting for her plate the most delicate morsels on the board, pressed her to partake of them.

When breakfast was over, he seated her comfortably in an easy-chair, put a footstool under her feet, placed an illustrated volume of Shakespeare on the stand beside her, and then said—

"I have one or two of Thorpe's permanent patients, chronic hypochondriacs, to see to-day, dear Alice, so I must even leave you for an hour or two. I will call and ask Mrs. Mostyn to come to you for a little while. Do not think, dearest; make yourself comfortable, read, do anything rather than think, while I am away."

And kissing her tenderly, and bidding her trust in Heaven, Dr. Heath withdrew, and left the house.

In passing the jail, he stopped at the dwelling-house of the warden, where he remembered that Mrs. Mostyn was lodging. He went in at the gate, knocked, and inquired for the lady. He was told that she was at home, and was shown into a parlour, where Constance soon joined him, holding out her hand as she entered, and exclaiming—

"Oh, I am so glad you called; I wished so much to hear of that poor child. She is released from confinement upon your recognizance, I know. But where is she now? what refuge has she in her great distress?"

"The refuge of her husband's heart and home, Mrs.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Mostyn. I have this morning made Alice Owen my wife," said Dr. Heath, gravely.

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Constance, in astonishment.

Francis Heath bowed gravely, adding—

"I took her from the magistrate's office to the church."

Constance gazed in surprise at an act of self-devotion and moral heroism of which, until now, she had thought only woman capable, and then her glorious face became suddenly radiant with enthusiastic admiration; and, advancing towards him she exclaimed, fervently—

"It was nobly done; give me your hand, Francis Heath. It was nobly, nobly done. God bless you!"

She cordially pressed the hand that he had extended to her, released it and sat down. Still regarding him with eyes full of generous sympathy, she inquired—

"Your friends, Dr. Heath, how will they regard this act of magnanimity of yours? Your professional connection, how will it be affected by this affair? I am a woman, and cannot judge, so I would like to be informed."

"I cannot tell you; it remains to be seen," said Francis Heath, smiling sadly.

"Your sister?" inquired Constance.

"My sister is a very excellent woman in most circumstances. That she is not equal to a crisis of this sort must not be accounted a crime," said Francis Heath, still smiling sadly.

"I see that even you are conscious how fatal to all your worldly prospects is your heroic act. But God reigns and Christ has overcome the world!" said Constance, with tears of mingled admiration and compassion starting to her eyes.

"Well," said Francis with a smile and a sigh, "let me but see my poor, innocent Alice safely through her perils, and I shall be content. If society frowns too darkly on us here, why the world is wide, and India or America offers a new field."

"And heaven will prosper you wherever you go, be

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

sure of that," said Constance, fervently. "But Alice! how is she?"

"Poor child! still suffering very much from all that she has gone through. Still very much in need of the kind, encouraging sympathy of some gentle lady friend," replied the doctor, gravely.

"I will go to her to-day; I will go to her at once," said Constance, eagerly.

"Indeed, I came hither with the purpose of asking you to be so kind."

"Where shall I find her? Where is she?"

"At my house; the one lately occupied by my predecessor, Mr. Thorpe. It is at the end of this street, a little farther down than the court-house, but on the opposite side of the way," said Dr. Heath, and then warmly thanking Mrs. Mostyn in behalf of Alice, he arose and took his leave.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AN INFAMOUS PROPOSAL.

WE must now return to Alice, whom we left sitting in the quiet home to which her husband had introduced her.

It was while the poor young creature yet remained alone, and bewildered with the strangeness of her position, that the door was opened, and a visitor was ushered in by Martin, who immediately retired, leaving them together.

Alice, who had been sitting upon the side of her sofa, with her head drooped upon her hand, looked up, and, in terror and abhorrence, recognized her mortal enemy. She would have started up and called the retreating servant, but that her limbs and voice failed as she gazed upon the fatal countenance of her persecutor.

While her eyes were still magnetized, as it were, to his face, he drew the easy chair before her, threw himself into it, and sitting at ease, with his hands resting

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

upon his knees, stooped forward, looked steadily in her face, and said—

"I called at the prison to see you this morning, Alice, but was told that you had been released upon the recognizance of Francis Heath. Coming hither to inquire, I find that you are under his protection. But what will that protection avail you Alice? Can you escape me? Have I made my words good? Are you in my power?"

"Remorseless sinner," breathed the girl, in a fainting voice.

"No hard names, Alice, if you please, for they may be returned with interest, you know. What if I were to repay you back in words, such as these," and he whispered, "'thief, felon, convict!' 'Those who live in glass houses should not throw stones,' it is said. But, fair one, I did not come hither to quarrel, but to compromise with you, if possible."

Alice, white, cold, and trembling, started up to spring to the door and call assistance, but her tormentor quietly rose and stood in her way, fixing upon her a steady look that seemed to paralyse her limbs, for she sank back into her seat.

"Ah!" said the visitor, as he saw this effect. "Alice I came here to save you, if you will consent to be saved."

"To save me, destroyer?" fell from the faltering lips of the victim.

"Yes; to save you, if, as I said, you will be saved."

Shuddering, she averted her head, and dropped her face into her hands.

"Alice," he continued, reseating himself, advancing his lips close to her ear, and sinking his voice to a whisper, "Alice, it will not be easy, but it will be possible, to free you from this charge upon which you are to be tried. Listen to me! Consent to be mine, and I will say that to-day I have discovered the jewels were placed in your trunk through the mistake of a careless servant who assisted you in packing, and so withdraw the prosecution. Say, Alice, will you consent to these terms?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Serpent—no!" replied the girl, shrinking from his contact.

"No? Well, hear me before you make that 'no' final; let me inform you what 'no' involves before you render it irrevocable. That 'no' involves the continuation of the prosecution; your case will go to trial; the positive evidence, the jewellery found in your possession, will convict you; the value of the jewellery is fifteen hundred pounds; it will send you to prison for ten years of close confinement and hard labour. Do you hear that? Speak, do you hear that?"

Alice shivered, but disdained to reply.

"Can you, a delicate girl, bear prison discipline—a narrow cell, a straw mattress, coarse food, hard labour, harsh usage, and the companionship only of felons and jailers, and all this for ten long years?"

Still she continued to shudder and to be silent.

"And above all, can you bear the irremediable disgrace? Look up, girl. Speak, for I will have a reply."

Suddenly Alice dropped her hands from before her pale and agonized face, and answered—

"No, I could not for a week endure the life you have exhibited to me, least of all could I bear the degradation."

"I know you could not, Alice, and I only held it up before you *in terrorem*, as the pedagogues say. I only raised the storm to drive you into my sheltering arms. Judge how great must be my passion for you, Alice, to carry me to such lengths for its gratification. Come, be mine," he said, attempting to take her hand, but she shrank shuddering away from him, exclaiming—

"Fool and blind! I said I could not for a week endure the life of indignities you held up before my mind. Think you I could bear for an hour the life of sin you offer as my ransom? I added that least of all I could bear degradation—think you I could better bear to deserve it? Fool and blind! I can die—that is what I meant."

"Rash and perverse girl! Drive me from your side, and, drop by drop, to its uttermost dregs, shall you drink the cup of misery and disgrace prepared for you.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

You shall live and groan through hours, days, weeks months, years of the life I have pictured, for no instruments of self-destruction will be left in your reach."

"Nor would I use them if they were. I feel in my breast symptoms of dying—I should die!"

"There is no necessity for that, foolish, girl. I offer you a blissful alternative. Why should you prefer a prison to freedom, loathsome living to luxury, harsh driving to tender caresses, infamy to honour, death to life?"

"Oh, I am most culpable to hear you so long. Away, sir, for even were you as honourable as you are base, I am a wedded wife, and must not listen to you."

"A wedded wife!" exclaimed the baffled suitor, in incredulous amazement.

"Yes, sir; one who has more strength of faith than I have has this morning thrown his legal protection around me," said Alice, in a firmer voice, gathering strength from the very thought of that royal-hearted friend who had so nobly drawn her, all wretched as she was, to the shelter of his bosom.

"A wife! ha, ha, ha! Well, your legal protector cannot shield you from the law, minion! None can save you from that, or from the county jail that must follow, but myself! Remember!"

"Leave me, sir! or I shall rise and call assistance!" exclaimed Alice, who had now partly recovered from the first effects of her terror.

"And so the fool has married you, forsooth," he exclaimed, starting up and striding up and down the room. Then pausing, and confronting her with his huge frame shaking, and his harsh face flashing with passion, he cried—

"A wedded wife, said you? A hopeful dower will your bring your husband—a dower of guilt, misery, and dishonour! He shall see you arraigned as a thief, convicted as a felon, sentenced as a convict! And there in the open court will I so blacken your character, that every friend you have shall shrink in honour from your contact; and he, your husband, shall curse the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

hour when your fatal charms lured him to such deep dishonour."

With a half-suppressed shriek, Alice covered her face with her hands, and sank back half-fainting upon the sofa.

Just at that moment the door was opened by Martin, who announced—

"Mrs. Mostyn."

And Constance entered.

In an instant Dr. Horne recovered his self-possession, composed his countenance to a mild and mournful expression, modulated his voice to a gentle and sorrowful tone, and said—

"Well, young woman, since you utterly refuse to account for the presence of the pearls in your trunk, I see no other way than to permit the law to take its course! Good morning, Mrs. Mostyn," he added, bowing to that lady as he passed out.

Constance returned the salutation with a cold nod, and passed into the room.

"Well, my poor Alice, what is the matter?"

"Oh, the snake! the snake!" cried the girl, in loathing.

"What snake, good Alice?"

"The snake that has just glided from the room."

"Dr. Horne?"

"Yes, madam. He came here to renew his sinful suit! He offered to save me on dishonourable terms!"

"Alice, you astound me!" exclaimed the lady, sinking into a chair, and gazing in amazement upon the speaker.

"Mrs. Mostyn, I do not know how it is that I bear to tell you!"

"Alice, if you can but prove that he has made you these proposals you are saved!"

"Oh, Heaven, yes! so I am! Well, you can prove it, can you not? You know I screamed, and you found him in the room—did you not?" said Alice, eagerly.

"Yes, dear girl, I did, but under circumstances that never would have led me to suppose that he had behaved so very improperly—quite the contrary. And whatever

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

your statement may lead me to believe, the only fact to which I could testify would not help you."

"But would not my own oath be taken in evidence of his perfidy?"

"Poor girl, no; no more than it would be taken in evidence of your innocence."

"Oh, I see! Oh, the serpent! the serpent!"

They were interrupted by the entrance of Francis Heath, who had just returned from making his professional calls in the town.

Both Mrs. Mostyn and Alice refrained for the present from mentioning the visit of Dr. Horne.

And soon after Constance arose and bade them adieu.

CHAPTER XXXV.

DEATH OF MRS. HORNE.

ALICE had never found courage to inform her lover of the original cause of Dr. Horne's persecution of herself; but now that her lover had become her husband, she felt that he was entitled to her unreserved confidence.

But how should she be able to tell him this tale?

It is true that, at the magistrate's office under the high pressure of terror, and to explain her position, she had told of the unprincipled conduct of the man; and to Constance Mostyn, because the latter was a woman, she had been able to relate the terrible story.

But how, for very modesty, should she ever manage to make the degrading disclosure to Francis Heath? And how, for very terror, could she bear to witness his inevitable indignation, and see him go off to seek some fatal encounter with her persecutor?

Alice was weak, timid, shrinking; she had nothing whatever of the trenchant bravery of Constance Mostyn's spirit. Therefore, she relied on Constance, and resolved to consult her, and to be guided by her counsel.

One afternoon Mrs. Mostyn came in to see her, and Alice explained her embarrassment.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"It is not only from very shame that I shrink from telling him, but also from fear for him. How must I blush to answer the questions he will certainly ask me; and how tremble to know that he will surely demand satisfaction of my enemy? Oh! if I do not tell him, my reserve will be a sort of 'misprison of treason!' and if I do, my communication will assuredly hurry him into more trouble! Advise me—whall shall I do?" she asked, in conclusion of her explanation.

"Tell Francis all—every jot and tittle; though your cheeks should blush with womanly shame in repeating the insults to which you have been subjected, and though they may grow pale with fear of the consequences the recital may entail, yet tell him the whole," replied Constance, firmly. "It is for you to feel the fullest faith in him who has so richly merited your trust, and it is for him to act according to his own judgment in the premises. Besides, my poor girl, you should understand that the knowledge of your great wrongs is absolutely necessary to your advocate in preparing your defence."

"Ah, yes, if I could gain credence. You, dear lady, believe me; so does Mr. Mostyn, and so does Francis; but will anyone else credit the unsupported statement of an obscure and friendless girl against the well-established reputation of Dr. Horne and the circumstantial evidence he can produce? Would not, to tell this story, be to risk my dear husband's safety without the smallest chance of procuring my own? For, oh, lady, there is no chance for me—none, none. I shall perish—irremediably perish; but I would not draw him down into destruction with me. Too greatly have I already wronged him in consenting to be his wife. I must do him no further harm; for oh, if it were to save my body from the burning, I would not have him scathe one hair of his head. Do you not know this?" she asked, wringing her hands.

"Yes, I know it. Nevertheless, poor Alice, it is right that you should make this disclosure; and you should do right irrespective of consequences, leaving them to God—that is, faith," said Constance, decidedly.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Mrs. Mostyn's decision of character governed poor Alice; and, that night, when Francis Heath came home from his round of patients, and entered her chamber, and their conversation turned upon the subject of her approaching trial, she told him all.

He heard her through, almost without a comment, but with corrugated brows, gleaming eyes, and compressed lips—all more terrible in their stillness of suppressed excitement than the greatest outbreak of fury could have been.

And at the close of this recital he stooped and kissed her forehead and her hand; then arose, took down his hat, and turned to leave the room.

Alice sprang after him and seized his hand, exclaiming—

"Francis, oh, dear Francis, where are you going?"

"No where, dear wife, but whither you may safely pray God speed me."

"Ah, but what are you about to do, Francis?"

"Nothing, my much-injured love, but what I may well ask God's blessing upon," he answered, pausing long enough to draw her upon his bosom in a parting embrace. Then releasing her, he ran down stairs, and out of the street door.

And Alice re-entered her lonely chamber to walk the floor, weep, and wait his return.

Francis Heath threw himself upon horseback, and galloped rapidly across the plains, through the forest, and over the mountain ridge that lay between the village and Radnor's ruin, at which he arrived by nine o'clock.

Drawing rein at the front porch, he sprang from his saddle, ran up the steps, and rang a peal that soon brought a servant in haste to open the door.

"Is your master in?"

"No, sir; he has just gone out."

"Whither?"

"To see a patient, sir."

"What patient?"

"I do not know, sir; one who has sent for him in haste."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Very well, I will wait for him," said the visitor, with grim resolution, striding into the hall, and throwing himself into a seat.

The servant looked perplexed: but being overawed by something in the aspect of the speaker, he bowed, retired, and left him to himself.

And for hours Francis Heath sat there, with stern determination, awaiting the arrival of Dr. Horne.

It was some time after midnight that, reluctantly giving up the hope of seeing the master of the house that night, the visitor, unwilling to torture his own wife by a longer absence from his home, arose and left the hall, remounted his horse, and rode rapidly towards the village.

It was near morning when he reached his house, when he found Alice up, and anxiously watching for him.

By her eager inquiries, she gained from him the fact that no encounter had as yet taken place between himself and Dr. Horne; and for this postponement of the dreaded event the poor girl breathed a fervent—

"Thank God!"

The next day Francis Heath again rode over to Radnor, but with no better success. The delinquent was not to be seen. And for many days thereafter he diligently sought the dastard, who quite as diligently kept out of the way.

At last, one Thursday afternoon, when he had surely tracked his enemy home to Radnor's Ruin, he rode up to the door, threw himself from his horse, ran up the steps, and knocked with so imperious a hand that he quickly brought a servant in answer to his summons.

"Your master is at home now, for I saw him enter the house! Take my card to him immediately, and tell him that I am waiting impatiently to see him!" said the visitor, in a peremptory tone, thrusting the pasteboard into the hand of the man.

"Yes, sir, but——" said the servant, hesitating.

"But what, you stupid fellow? What subterfuge now?" exclaimed the gentleman, chafing with anger and impatience.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Why, perhaps you are not aware, sir, that my mistress is dying, and my master was summoned in haste to come to her."

"Dying! your mistress, Dr. Horne's wife, dying!"

"As I just had the honour to inform you, sir."

"I believe you are deceiving me," thought Francis Heath, fixing a penetrating gaze upon the servant.

"Since when has Mrs. Horne been worse?"

"Ever since she heard how Miss Alice Owen was taken up for steal——"

"Silence, villain!" thundered the young man, in a tone that made the servant turn death-like with terror. Then blaming himself for having spoken so furiously to a poor wretch, who only parrot-like repeated what he had heard, he inquired, with a calmer manner—

"How long has Mrs. Horne been supposed to be dying?"

"Ever since she heard what I told your honour," replied the man, cautiously.

His report was soon confirmed by the old nurse, who chanced to pass through the hall in going downstairs upon an errand. And thus it was evident, even to the natural incredulity of the frequently-deceived and baffled inquirer, that the mistress of the mansion was really in the last extremity, and thus also it followed that, as he could not properly call a man from the bedside of a dying wife, justice must remain for the present in abeyance.

At sunset that evening Mrs. Horne expired. And poor Alice, hearing of the event, found tears to spare from her own personal sorrows to give to the memory of her earliest friend.

On Sunday the funeral of Mrs. Horne was solemnized with great pomp.

And on Monday the spring term of the criminal court opened, and the trial of Alice Owen, the first upon the list, was expected to come on.

Always the opening of the court term collects a crowd of people at the court house, and this occasion was far from being an exception to the rule. The town was full.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

True, the trial of a poor girl for larceny is unhappily no such rare case as to make a public sensation; but then there were circumstances connected with that of Alice Owen which constituted it one of peculiar interest.

She was beautiful, graceful, and accomplished; and though the child of humble parents, she had been accustomed to mingle on something approaching to equal terms with the respectable society of the county.

She had been the principal witness in the late great murder trial, upon which occasion her loveliness of face, form, and manner, no less than her painful reluctance to testify against the prisoner, had attracted general attention.

Now, her arrest upon the degrading charge of theft; her incredible statements so tremendously implicating the character of her prosecutor; the incomprehensible circumstance that the Mostyns, upon whom her testimony in the murder case had borne so fatally, were now her partisans; and, above all, her strange marriage with Francis Heath, on the morning after her arrest, all combined to excite a very great and general feeling of curiosity.

The case, confounding as it was, "lay in a nutshell."

Alice Owen had hitherto been a girl not only of unblemished character, but high reputation for piety.

Francis Heath, who had given her the testimonial of his own name and hand, was a gentleman of known honour.

But then Dr. Horne, the prosecutor, was also a man of unquestioned truth.

From the data in their possession, the little world of Gwyn made up various opinions. The great majority, having, entire faith in the unquestionable reputation of Dr. Horne, utterly discredited the story of Alice Owen, whom they looked upon as one of those wicked, artful, and dangerous females whom it would be desirable to see imprisoned, hanged, or in any other way suppressed; and viewed Francis Heath as the victim of her beauty, art, and machinations.

Others, again, putting equal trust in Dr. Horne's integrity, yet considered him harsh in prosecuting to

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

the utmost extent of the law a poor orphan-girl, scarcely passed childhood, and benevolently hoped that there might be some mistake which the trial should clear up; and they heartily wished her and her generous husband well over their troubles.

No one, perhaps, except the Mostyns and Francis Heath, doubted the honesty of Dr. Horne, or thoroughly believed in the innocence of Alice.

All parties looked forward to the approaching trial with the deepest interest and curiosity.

But poor Alice!

The morning of that fatal day found her pale, trembling, and shrinking from the impending crisis, even as the most guilty might shrink from conviction.

At an early hour a sheriff's officer appeared at the house. Her failing limbs could scarcely support her while standing before the little mirror arranging her morning dress; her quivering fingers could scarcely clasp the hooks of her black bodice; at length, indeed, she sank helplessly into a chair; and then her husband, with affectionate care, completed her toilet—tying on her small black velvet bonnet, wrapping her in the little black mantle, and drawing on her tiny gloves.

"Now, my own dear love, trust in Heaven and be firm, will you not?" asked Francis, as he stooped and kissed her.

"As the Lord shall give me grace," she replied, clasping her hands.

The carriage was waiting at the door to convey her to the court house.

Poor old Mrs. Martin came up, bringing a cup of strong coffee, which she kindly forced upon her young guest. Alice, to please her, drank a little.

Francis Heath then conducted his poor wife down stairs, placed her in the carriage, where an officer was in attendance, and directed the coachman to drive to the court-house.

In ten minutes they had reached the place.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ALICE'S TRIAL FOR THEFT AT THE ASSIZES.

FRANCIS handed Alice out, drew the veil closely around her face, and hurried her out through the gaping crowd to the court-room, which was full of spectators, and where the judge, surrounded by lawyers and law officers, already occupied the bench.

Alice, closely veiled, and almost fainting, was placed in the dock, and permitted to have a chair.

Some time was spent iu empanneling the jury and other preliminaries, and then Alice was placed at the bar.

She stood up, holding by the railing in front for support, and drew aside her veil, revealing such a sweet, child-like, innocent face, that every beholder was moved to pity and wonder that such a young, pure, and lovely-looking creature should be standing there to answer such a charge.

"Prisoner at the bar, you have heard the indictment; are you guilty or not guilty of the felony therein charged upon you?" asked the clerk.

"Not guilty! Indeed, indeed I am not, sir," rather informally replied poor Alice, clasping her small hands, and raising her tearful eyes to Heaven, as if silently invoking Divine witness to her truth, and then sinking exhausted into the chair.

The trial began.

The public prosecutor opened the case, stating the theory of the theft in a few cold words, for, truth to tell, he did not relish his present duty, and his eye turned more in compassion than in denunciation upon the young creature whom, at worst, he regarded only as a very bad child, fitter subject for a parent's chastening rod than for a criminal court's judgment. Having stated his case, he proceeded to call his witnesses.

"Let Dr. Horne take the stand."

Every spectator turned towards that part of the court-room whence this gentleman was seen to arise and advance towards the box; and as he took his

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

place to give in his testimony, every eye was riveted upon him in surprise, perplexity, and conjecture.

Could this be the handsome, graceful, and fascinating Dr. Horne? His tall and athletic figure was bowed and tremulous; his fine face pallid and haggard; his eyes wild, as with pain, grief, or fear.

Being duly sworn, he commenced, and in a distracted and wandering manner, gave the same testimony that he had offered at the preliminary examination—to the effect that he had often detected the prisoner at the bar in petty theft; that he had perseveringly endeavoured to reform her; that, pitying her orphan condition, he had retained her in his family as long as he possibly could do so; that, finding her perfectly incorrigible, he had at length felt obliged to dismiss her; that soon after her withdrawal from his house he had discovered the loss of the jewels that were the same night found in her possession.

Dr. Horne, as I said, gave in his testimony in a hesitating, faltering, and disjointed manner, that excited the surprise, curiosity, and speculation of all who saw and heard him.

"How unwilling he is to testify against the girl," said some. "How badly he feels! it is easy to see that he is a kind-hearted man," said others.

Francis Heath, who stood just beneath the dock where the prisoner was enclosed, raised himself, and whispered to her—

"Look at that man, Alice. If ever I saw perjurer written legibly upon a human being's brow, it is impressed upon his."

Alice stole a glance at her persecutor, shuddered, and withdrew her eyes. The poor girl was amazed and frightened at everything she saw and heard—the crowded court-room, the judge on the bench, the jury in their box, the array of lawyers, the formality of the proceedings, all awed and oppressed her to faintness—but this evil spirit, this haggard perjurer in the witness-box, made her sick unto death with terror, loathing, and abborrence.

Dr. Horne having finished his testimony, would have

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

willingly withdrawn, but the counsel for the prisoner arose, and took him in hand for a cross-examination. But, though the witness was evidently ill, unnerved, and confused, yet he was very careful not to contradict himself, and so, successfully, he passed the severe ordeal. Then pleading sickness, exhaustion, and sorrow from recent domestic affliction in the loss of his wife, he begged permission to withdraw, and was allowed to retire.

The two policemen who arrested Alice Owen were next, in turn, examined. Each being duly sworn, testified to the finding of the casket of pearls in the possession of the prisoner.

The jewellery was then produced in court, and identified—first by the policemen, as the same found in the trunk of Alice Owen, and afterwards by Dr. Horne, who was recalled, as the property of his late wife.

The Crown's counsel then briefly and coldly summed up the evidence, and the prosecution rested.

Mr. Wright, the counsel for the prisoner, arose for the defence. He gave, with more feeling and eloquence than sound logic, perhaps, his client's exposition of her case. He spoke of the prisoner's youth, beauty, and grace; of her helpless orphanage and dependent position in the household of Dr. Horne; of her employer's unprincipled pursuit of this fatherless, motherless, and friendless girl; of his alarming threats and machinations against her; of the partial success, at least, with which those threats and machinations had been followed up. But did anyone believe, he asked, that they could be successfully carried out? Could anyone look upon the sweet, young face of his client, and doubt her spotless innocence? Or could they gaze upon the countenance of her persecutor as he stood in the witness-box, and give an instant's credence to his statements? The front of the one was the front of a demon—that of the other, the face of an angel—yes, of an angel in woman's form, such as, from the whole history of her blameless and beneficent life, he would prove her to be, by a host of witnesses,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

whom he should call for the purpose; but first of all, he said, he would indicate *one*, his friend, Francis Heath, whom they all knew to be a gentleman of the highest worth, but who could not legally testify in behalf of the prisoner, because, since her arrest, he had given her the strongest testimony it was possible to give of his confidence and esteem—he had given her his hand in marriage. The sole fact advanced against his client was the finding of the missing jewellery in her trunk. Was that one deceptive fact to be taken against the testimony of her whole good life, and that of the esteem of all who knew her well? How easily might that casket have been conveyed into her trunk for her destruction! How much more rational to suppose that it was thus treacherously put into her unconscious possession, than that she who had lived from infancy a pure and pious life, should in one hour become a thief and a felon! The gentlemen of the jury must not, upon such slight grounds, consign a young, lovely, and innocent woman to the ignominy of a prison. Unless the Crown's counsel could produce some stronger evidence, he should demand for his client a prompt acquittal.

He then called, in succession, several highly respectable witnesses, who each, in turn, bore testimony to the excellent character hitherto sustained by Alice Owen. And having thus made the best possible defence out of the poorest material, the counsel for the prisoner sat down.

The counsel for the Crown waived his privilege, or else dodged the duty, of having the last word in the argument.

The judge arose to sum up the evidence and charge the jury. He reviewed the case in a clear, cold, candid manner, dwelling upon the testimony of Dr. Horne, and the finding of the stolen property in the possession of the prisoner, as evidence of the most positive character known in law; but exhorting them, if any doubt rested upon their minds as to the guilt of the prisoner, to let her have the benefit of that doubt.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

The judge sat down, and the jury retired under charge of the head constable to deliberate upon their verdict.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"GUILTY!"

WHEN the door had closed noiselessly after the retiring jury, the stillness of suspended animation fell upon the court-room.

Like a statue sat the venerable judge upon his bench.

Like automata the lawyers bent their heads together and conversed, if they conversed at all, in almost inaudible whispers.

Pale and almost dying in the agony of this suspense, Alice leaned back in her seat. Once she spoke in a hoarse whisper. Francis Heath bent eagerly forward to know what she wished to say.

"Oh, will it be long?" she asked, in an expiring tone.

"No, dearest, we hope not; we trust that they will soon return with your acquittal; for even they *must* have a doubt; and the judge has instructed them to give you the benefit of that doubt; take courage, dearest Alice."

Time crept slowly—slowly—past. An hour went by, another followed, and yet the jury came not.

"Oh! will it be much longer?" again groaned Alice.

"No, no, dear love, it cannot be, you know," replied her husband.

Another hour crept slowly by, and still another. One by one the spectators withdrew from the court to procure refreshment, and the lawyers looked restless and the judge sleepy.

"Oh, Heaven! can it be much longer?" wailed Alice, in a dying tone.

"No, no, sweet wife, be patient; this very delay is a most auspicious omen. They could not acquit you without this debate," said Francis, who then beckoned a constable to his side, and despatched him to the nearest pastry-cook's for refreshments.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

The messenger returned with wine and biscuits, which Francis Heath tried to press upon the acceptance of his wife. But she put them away, saying—

"Dear Francis, I cannot. If I could I would do it for your sake; but my throat is constricted, I can scarcely speak, I cannot possibly swallow." And her head dropped upon the railing before her.

And still slowly, slowly moved the leaden hours. The clock struck seven. The judge rose from his seat and the court was adjourned till ten o'clock the next morning.

Lifting Alice in his arms, Francis Heath bore her to the carriage, took her home, and laid her, in an almost expiring condition, upon the bed. Then he summoned the kind-hearted Martin, and, with her assistance, he applied all his medical skill to the restoration of the nearly dying girl. It was a long time before she spoke, and then it was in a manner that went to the hearts of those who heard her—

"Oh! Francis, Francis, this is very terrible; the blackness of darkness. Oh, Francis, dear, let me die; it is the most merciful thing you can do for me!"

"Dear Alice, try to take courage; be firm and patient, love. This delay is really auspicious, and cannot last much longer. Shall I send for Mrs. Mostyn to come to you?"

"No, no, I wish to see no one—not even her; I only want you, dear, devoted friend, to be with me while yet you may," she said.

What a miserable night was that which followed!

Alice never slept for an instant, but lay with her eyes closed and her hands clasped above her head, silently praying for death, as for a priceless blessing.

Francis Heath sat beside her bed, watching her with devoted affection. Yes, it was a miserable night! but even more miserable was the next fatal day.

At ten o'clock, Alice, in the same half-dying state, was lifted from her bed, and by the united assistance of Francis Heath and Mrs. Martin, she was dressed and conducted to the carriage which was to convey her to the court-house.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

On arriving thither she was lifted out and supported into the court-room to the same seat she had occupied on the previous day.

Her husband sat down beside her as near as he could get.

The court-room was even more crowded than on the preceding day; but a strange stillness prevailed throughout the assembly.

As before, hour after hour of breathless suspense passed.

The sheriff sometimes passed backwards and forwards between the court-room and the jury-room, but nothing could be learned from his impassable countenance. A rumour was, however, beginning to be circulated to the effect that the jury was 'hung.'

"Oh, Lord of mercy! can it be much longer?" groaned Alice, from the depth of her anguish.

"Pray to God; be patient; be firm, sweet Alice," whispered her husband.

Another dreary hour passed, and then a buzz went through the court of 'They are coming!' and the door was thrown open and the jury came in.

Francis Heath saw spasm after spasm convulse the form of his wife, as her head rested on the rails. He looked up quickly to see if he could read her fate in the faces of those who held it in their hands. And his own heart seemed to die in his bosom as he saw them advance, two by two, with grave faces bent upon their breasts. The pre-vision of his heart was true. The verdict was—

"*Guilty!*"

As this dreadful word passed from the foreman's lips Francis Heath saw the spasms that shook his wife's form suddenly cease.

"Let the prisoner stand up to receive the sentence of the law," ordered the clerk.

"She has fainted, I fear, your lordship," replied the broken-hearted Francis.

But to his surprise he saw Alice move and tremble slightly, and the next instant she arose, and pale indeed as death, stood up.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

And amid the profound silence that ensued the judge pronounced her doom. For her alleged offence the law prescribed imprisonment for a term of not less than five or more than ten years. The judge, in well-meant mercy, gave her the minimum. She was sentenced to five years of confinement at hard labour in the county prison—the sentence to take effect upon the following Friday.

At the conclusion of his words Alice sank back in her seat.

"Oh, Alice! Oh, my wife," burst in anguish from the lips of her husband as he bent over her.

"No, no wife of yours now; only a convict; dear Francis, see—I can bear this certainty of the worst better than that suspense which stretched my whole soul upon the rack. Take comfort; think that you have done all that humanity could possibly do for the poor lost girl; you took me to the shelter of your warm, strong heart, and threw over me the shield of your name and legal protection. Let the thought of your perfect goodness to me console you when I am gone. Good-bye, and may God comfort, love, and bless you—noble heart," she said.

"Alice! Alice! Oh, that I could die for you!" he cried.

"Let the prisoner be removed from the court," ordered the judge.

"I am very sorry, Dr. Heath, but I am forced, you know, to take away my prisoner," whispered the constable at his elbow.

"Oh, Alice! must you be torn from me!" he cried, losing all self-command.

"Francis, dear Francis, do you take courage now. Be the Christian hero that you were. Bless me and let me go," said Alice.

After all the mortal anguish of her suspense how awfully calm she was, now that all hope had fled and the very worst was known!

"Dr. Heath," said the pitying constable, "you can go with her to the prison, you know; give her your arm, and support her to the carriage, for, notwithstanding her

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

admirable fortitude, you see she is physically very feeble."

Francis Heath, with an ejaculatory prayer, arose and did as he was permitted. And leaning on his arm and closely followed by the officer, Alice was conducted from the court and placed in the carriage. A drive of five minutes brought her to the prison, where she was met by the compassionate jailer, who conducted her back to her former cell, where the constable left her.

Francis Heath was permitted to remain with her a short time.

And Mrs. Mostyn, who had with great grief heard of the verdict, as soon as she could sufficiently compose her excited feelings, came to visit her.

"Do not despair, but pray, dear Alice," she said. "God reigns, and His power is greater than our greatest extremity. You may yet be cleared, for while there is life there is hope."

"I know it," answered Alice, calmly, "and I, too, hope."

But while she spoke how short her breathing was!

With newly-aroused fear her husband noticed this, and saying—

"You are very much exhausted, Alice; let me lay you down," he gently took her in his arms and placed her in an easy position on the cot. Still her breathing grew shorter, her face paler, her lips bluer, her eyes dimmer.

"I have some spirits of lavender—a fine restorative—in my medicine-chest; let me go and fetch it," said Mrs. Mostyn, leaving the cell for the expressed purpose, while Dr. Heath sat beside the sufferer, anxiously watching her countenance, holding her hand, and smoothing her forehead.

When the lady returned with the restorative, he would have put it to her lips, but she waved it off, and sadly shook her head; and when he would have pressed the cordial on her acceptance, she sorrowfully smiled, saying—

"Dear friends it would be a cruel kindness to place a

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

cordial to the lips of one who is dying on the rack ; it would be a merciful neglect to suffer such a one to die."

"But dear Alice," said Mrs. Mostyn, "you must live! live and recover, and hope! Your sentence may never be carried into effect."

"I know it will not, madam," answered Alice, with a strange smile.

"I speak it from a certain conviction, Alice," said Constance.

"And I also, lady," added Alice, with the same sweet, solemn manner.

"I mean, dear Alice, that my husband, who is a lawyer, you know, is now engaged in drawing up a petition to the Minister in your name and behalf. Before twelve o'clock this petition will be signed by a hundred persons ; before to-morrow night it will be in the hands of the Minister. Lord Starr saw you and knew you at Llyndell ; he can't but remember and compassionate you : and I have no doubt that, before Thursday evening, the pardon will be in the hands of the sheriff."

"Ah, madam, to be pardoned for a crime I could never have committed—could such a thing as that save me?" inquired Alice, with bitter and sorrowful emphasis.

Mrs. Mostyn had nothing to reply to that searching question ; but after a little while, she said—

"Alice, how you will be saved I do not know, but that you will be I feel sure. The justice of Heaven is your security."

As she spoke there came a knock at the door ; it was from Mr. Wardour, who had all this time been keeping guard outside, and who now put in his head to warn them that the hour for locking up having arrived, Dr. Heath must take leave of his wife ; secondly, that Mr. Mostyn had ready the petition for the doctor to carry around.

"And so, dear Alice, I must bid you good night, as I must obtain every possible signature before I leave for London, where I understand the Minister has now returned," said Francis Heath, and stooping, he pressed a kiss upon the brow of the stricken girl.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"You will care for her and comfort her, Mrs. Mostyn?" he asked, turning to the lady.

"As if she were my sister," replied Constance.

Another prayerful kiss upon the pallid brow of the sufferer, a deferential bow to Constance, and Francis Heath reluctantly withdrew from the cell.

Mrs. Mostyn remained near the poor convicted girl a little while longer, when she left her, apparently sleeping the sleep of exhaustion.

It was not really so. Poor Alice had feigned this sleep that the lady might have comfort.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

SUPPOSED DEATH IN THE PRISON CELL.

AS Constance had said, before twelve o'clock that night a hundred signatures were obtained to the pardon of Alice, and at midnight Francis Heath threw himself into the stage-coach that at that hour passed through Gwyn on its way to meet the London train, and commenced his anxious journey.

In still greater anxiety passed the hours to those left behind.

Constance could not sleep. Early she arose and went to the prison-gate, when, being admitted by Tom Turner, she went to the cell of Alice, and peeping through the grating, she saw the poor girl, lying wide awake, with her wild eyes flared back and fixed upon the ceiling.

"Alice, did you sleep well?" she inquired.

"If I did not, I shall soon, dear lady," replied the prisoner.

"Mr. Turner, please unlock the door, and let me in to her," said the lady.

The turnkey flew to do her bidding, and she passed in to the sufferer, sat down beside her, spoke soothingly to her, bathed her face and hands, and finally despatched Tom Turner for a cup of strong coffee, which, when brought, she coaxed her to drink. In a word,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Mrs. Mostyn remained as long as she possibly could do without neglecting her husband, and did all that was possible to be done to alleviate the condition of the unfortunate girl. She divided her time and attention almost equally between the two prisoners.

But through all that miserable day Alice remained extended upon her prison cot, her wild black hair streaming down each side of her pallid face, her thin, transparent hands pressed upon her eyes, as if to shut out light and life, her form motionless or trembling; patienly she bore her anguish; obediently she did all that she was told to do; thankfully she took every restorative that was offered her; and yet through all it was easy to see that she did these things rather for the sake of those who attended her than from any of hope of benefit.

"A sufferer so hopeless, so gentle, and so resigned, I never saw before," said Constance to Gerald.

"If her sentence is carried into effect she cannot live a week, nor, indeed, in that case, would it be desirable that she should," he replied.

Through all the miserable night that followed Alice lay sleepless, but uncomplaining. Near midnight, as before, she feigned sleep, that Constance, who was watching her, might go to rest.

The next morning, Thursday, Mrs. Mostyn, as on the day preceding, went early to her cell, where she found her lying upon her back, with her hands clasped above her head, and her open eyes fixed vacantly upon the ceiling in unwinking wakefulness.

This was the day upon which Dr. Heath was expected to return.

Dr. Heath, with the pardon, would, in all probability, reach Gwyn about sunset. If so, then Alice would, before tea-time, leave the prison for her home.

Constance reminded her of this probability, and sought to infuse hope into her despairing heart, to revive her drooping spirit, and nerve her failing strength.

But then again, should the pardon not be granted, this was the last, last day she could be permitted to remain, even in this county-prison cell, in reach of her

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

friends; for the next day, Friday, it was appointed that her sentence should be carried into effect—that she should be conveyed to the prison of Ghoran. And through this day, as through the preceding one, poor Alice lay almost lifeless, with her wild, black hair streaming down each side of her pallid face, and straggling over the coverlid; her pale hands pressed upon her eyes to shut out the daylight, and her fragile form motionless or convulsed, or towards evening, starting up in eager listening as for some approaching footstep.

"What excites you so, poor child?" inquired Constance, on seeing her spring up in this manner for the third or fourth time.

"I was listening for him! Oh, how I fear that he will not come to-night—that he will wait for the pardon—the pardon that will not be given him to-day, nor to-morrow, nor any other day; but I fear that he will wait for it, and so not come until it is too late!"

"It is your nervousness; never fear, dear Alice, but that he will surely come. The coach is late, I know, but then the roads, this thawing weather, are very bad; the coach will be in the town, and he will be in your presence very soon now," said the lady, cheerfully.

Alice for a little while lay still, with her hands pressed upon her eyes, and then, snatching them away, she started up and listened eagerly, as usual.

"It is nothing but a carriage rolling down the street, my dear."

She sank back silent and fainting, and then, removing her hands from her eyes, she looked around wildly, murmuring—

"Am I going blind, or is it growing dark, Mrs. Mostyn?"

"Growing dark?" Why, the setting sun was streaming through the grating, marking the panes in golden squares upon the floor of the cell. Mrs. Mostyn looked at the poor girl in astonishment, and saw with alarm that her face was darkened with a gray shadow, and her eyes glazed over with a dimness as of approaching death. Constance flew out, and brought a glass of wine, which she forced Alice to drink.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"I am dying, am I not, lady?" inquired the prisoner faintly.

"No, no: you are exhausted, that is all. Momentary failure of the eyesight is very often the effect of nervous prostration," replied Constance, eagerly.

"Hark! he has come! That is he at last—I know his step!" exclaimed Alice, starting up for the last time, and listening with suspended breath.

It was indeed his step. Constance also recognized it as it came near the cell.

"He has not got the pardon, lady; I know it by the slowness and heaviness of his footfall; but I knew it also before," said Alice.

The door opened, and Dr. Heath entered, pale, worn, and heart-broken, and stood gazing for a moment in despairing silence upon Alice, then he approached and sank upon his knees beside her cot, and extended his hands, as if to catch her to the shelter of his bosom.

He could not tell her in words that he had failed of saving her.

She half arose and cast her arms around his neck, and dropped her head upon his breast.

"Do not mind it, dear Francis; I am not disappointed; I knew it would be so; dear Francis, do not grieve so bitterly—all will be well," she said, tenderly caressing him as he bowed his head and wept—wept as only a strong, brave man, can weep.

"All will be well; a few days and this dark cloud will be lifted from your life; dear Francis, take courage," she repeated, for the few drops of wine that Constance had caused her to swallow lent her this strength to speak.

"Oh, that I could die to deliver you, gentle and innocent one! Oh, that I could suffer in your stead!" he exclaimed, with a strong burst of sorrow.

"You suffer more than I do; see, I do not suffer much; believe me, all will very soon be well."

While the heart-broken young couple thus conversed, Constance, sat, pale with pity, silently praying for them, but offering no word of comment.

At last, when Francis, kneeling beside the cot, had

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

compelled himself into a state of composure, and Alice, reclining back upon her pillow, still kept her hand resting upon his shoulder as in benediction, and her eyes fixed upon his face in deep affection, the sweet and solemn tones of Constance gently rose upon the silence.

"All is not lost in the first disappointment," she said; "the Minister may yet relent; he could not, perhaps, grant an immediate pardon; he would probably think some delay due in respect to the court. Dear Alice, try to bear up, love; dear Francis, take courage; you are both good; trust in God for deliverance," and stooping, she pressed a kiss upon the brow of Alice, and clasped the hand of Francis. The one returned her kindness with an earnest grasp, the other with a grateful glance, but neither spoke.

Constance arose to retire and leave them alone.

But at that moment there came a rap at the cell door, and the next instant Mr. Wardour presented himself, saying, with visible regret—

"I am very sorry, Dr. Heath, but the hour has arrived for shutting up, and——"

"Very well, I must withdraw, I suppose," said the young man, repressing the groan that arose to his lips.

"I grieve to say, yes, sir; but here is the sheriff outside, who would like to say a few words to you."

"I am at his orders. Alice, my love," he said, gently disengaging her hand from around his shoulder, and bending over her, "I must commit you to Heaven and its angels, and bid you good-night for the present. At the earliest hour of opening to-morrow I shall be with you again. Good night, dear love," and unmindful of the glances that might rest upon them, he bent and pressed a kiss upon her lips.

She took both his hands in hers, and holding them, gazed long and earnestly into his eyes; then, with a whispered "God bless you, Francis," she let them go.

He hurried from the cell. In the lobby the sheriff joined him, and they walked down together to the governor's office, where Mr. Harrison handed a chair

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

to his companion, and, taking another, entered into conversation by saying—

"You should be told, doctor, that I must send my prisoner to Ghoran early to-morrow."

"I know—I know," escaped in sudden gasps from the frozen lips of the young man, as he dropped his pallid and perspiring brow upon the palms of his hands. There was silence for a little while, broken at last by Francis, who inquired—

"At what hour, and by what conveyance do you send her?"

"At eight o'clock in the morning, in the usual prison van; I am very sorry it cannot be avoided."

"No, no," said the young man, mechanically.

"But, doctor, I did not bring you here to lacerate your feelings vainly; I wished to make a proposition to you."

"Go on," said Francis, in apathetic despair.

"I wished to tell you," said the sheriff, "that there is no absolute necessity for your being separated from her until the latest moment; in a word, there is no necessity for your bidding her a final farewell until the doors of the prison are about to close upon her."

"Oh, God! my God!" groaned the young man, as this image was evoked before his 'mind's eye.'

"Do not take it so hard, sir; no doubt it will all come right in the end; she will soon be set at liberty, and you can take her off to Canada or India, where this affair has never been heard of."

The young man shook his head in heart-broken hopelessness.

"But to the point," continued the sheriff. "I can trust you, sir, I know, and so I am willing to incur the responsibility of serving you. I shall, as I said, take her away in a prison van. There are four seats. A bailiff and the prisoner will occupy two, a constable will fill the third, the fourth one is heartily at your service, if you wish to accompany her on this sad journey, and will give me your word of honour that no attempt to interrupt the due course of law will be made."

"I thank you, sir, and will give you the required

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

pledge," said Francis Heath, in a hoarse and hollow voice.

And the interview ended.

Francis Heath went back to his desolate home, not to sleep, but to pass the night in prayer for her.

Alice in her cell, meanwhile, lay as he had left her—lay as she had lain every day and night since her conviction—with her pale hands pressed upon her eyeballs, and her wildly dishevelled black hair streaming over the coverlid. The fictitious strength lent her by the glass of wine was fast ebbing away.

Constance, watching beside her, saw her increasing pallor and faintness, and then bending over her, whispered—

"Alice, dear, had you not better take something to sustain your strength?"

"No, dear lady," replied the feeble voice; "I only wish to sleep; bid me good-night, and leave me to repose."

"I will sit with you until you slumber, then I will go," replied Constance.

"Stoop over me and kiss me, then, for I am going to sleep," murmured the failing voice.

Constance bent and kissed her again and again.

"There, that will do, sweet lady. God bless you, God love you, God comfort you in all your sorrows, as you have sought to comfort me. Good-night," said the poor girl, and pressing the hands of Constance to her heart and to her lips, she resigned them, and laid her own hands up over her eyes as before.

Still Constance sat and watched, and soon, by her regular breathing, she believed the sufferer to be at last asleep. She stooped over her and gazed upon her, to assure herself of the fact, and then, feeling reasonably certain that, for the present, the sorrows of that poor young heart were soothed in slumber, she softly sank down upon her knees beside the bed, and earnestly prayed for the deliverance of the innocent captive.

Then Constance arose, and giving another look to Alice, and feeling further convinced of the depth of her repose, she gently tapped upon the door, and beckoned

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Tom Turner, on guard in the lobby, to come and let her out. The good-natured turnkey hastened to set the lady at liberty, and when she had left the cell, he relocked the door, for, since her conviction, poor Alice had been a close prisoner.

Constance retired to her lodgings in the warden's house; but, despite the utter weariness of her many nights' watching, she could not sleep. The thought of that poor, innocent, persecuted girl, and her hideous fate, kept her awake until very near the morning, when, from sheer prostration, she fell into a disturbed slumber.

It was yet early when she awoke; her first returning thought was of Alice. She started up, dressed, and hurried to the jail. She was soon admitted to the upper lobby. She looked through the grating of Alice's cell, and, as she gazed, a piercing cry broke from her lips—for there lay the hapless girl, prostrate upon her back, her head upwards across the pillow, her face dark and pallid; her lips blue and rigid; her eyes wide open and stony in their sockets; her hands, that had slipped away from her face, tightly contracted, as if she had died in struggles. One moment after the cry of horror had escaped her lips, Constance stood and gazed, and then rushing from the cell door, she called—

"Mr. Turner, Mr. Turner, for the love of Heaven, come here! She is dead—dead in her prison cell!"

Quick as lightning, Tom Turner came running from the other extremity of the lobby, and in an instant unlocked the door.

Constance burst in, and lifted the head of the lifeless girl, while the turnkey followed and stood beside her, wringing his hands, and crying—

"Oh, poor thing! poor thing!"

"Mr. Turner, run; run and bring a doctor. Life may not be yet extinct."

The good-natured officer hastened away to do this errand; but, ere he reached the head of the stairs, he saw Dr. Heath, who had just gained admittance, coming up. Wanting the moral courage to tell him what had happened, the turnkey only beckoned him to come faster, and led the way to the cell. Without suspicion

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

of the event, Francis Heath hastened up the lobby and entered the cell, where he found Alice lying as we have described her, and Constance standing beside the bed, desperately trying to rub warmth into the lifeless hands.

He saw the truth at the first glance, looked for an instant as if turned to stone by the sight; then rushing to the bedside, he caught the body up in his arms, gazed into the face, laid it down again, rubbed and chafed the hands; groaned, invoked her by every fond epithet to revive, to return to life; called upon God and angels to give her back to his love; then finally he rushed from the cell, and after an absence of a very few minutes, returned with powerful stimulants, some of which he poured into the lifeless lips, and with some of which he chafed the frozen temples and rigid hands.

Useless his efforts! He seemed to know they were so even while he continued them.

Suddenly he laid them all aside, took a spring lancet from a little pocket-case, stripped up the sleeve of her left arm, and opened a vein; but not one drop of the coagulated vital fluid flowed out to give him hope of returning life.

Useless all! He felt it now, and closed his lancet, drew down her sleeve, reverently laid her body back upon the cot, and stood gazing upon it—the image of utter despair.

"Dear friend, be comforted. Oh, be sure it is better as it is," prayed Constance, through her streaming tears.

"Dead, dead! and alone in her prison cell," said Francis Heath, gazing in anguish upon the lovely, lifeless form.

"Oh, take comfort! It is well that her sorrows are all over! that she is safe for ever in the bosom of her Lord."

"Dead and alone in her prison cell," reiterated Francis Heath, mechanically gazing upon the beautiful wreck before them.

"The angel of God came down and delivered her from prison; and all is well with her," said Constance, still seeking to ameliorate the dreadful despair of the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

mourner. But he stood as if frozen to the spot, gazing upon the rigid form.

As yet the news of her death had not spread even through the prison.

Tom Turner stood at the cell door, with his thin, sharp face still more contracted through sorrow and sympathy, when the step of the jailer was heard along the lobby.

He came, followed by an officer. Evidently neither of them knew anything of what had occurred ; for as they approached the cell, the sheriff said to the jailer—

"Go in, if you please, and let the prisoner know that she should be ready in fifteen minutes to take the road." But as they appeared at the door, Constance met them, and said—

"Mr. Wardour, your prisoner has escaped you."

"Escaped !" re-echoed the officer, in consternation.

"Aye, she is at liberty."

"At liberty !"

"Even so ; her case has been reviewed by a higher tribunal ; her sentence has been reversed by a higher Judge, from whose decision there is no appeal."

"Madam, what mean you ?" asked the officer, in vague foreboding.

"Come and see," said Constance.

They entered the cell.

"*Dead !*" exclaimed the sheriff, in horror, as his eye fell upon the figure on the cot. "*Dead !*"

"Nay," replied Constance, solemnly, "the damsel is not dead, but liberated."

In deep awe the sheriff drew nearer and gazed upon the lovely, lifeless form lying extended on the cot, as still, as cold and white as some beautiful marble effigy ; and then silently withdrew from the cell.

It was then that Tom Turner, looking from the window, saw Dr. Horne, and uttered his name.

At the sound of that name, Francis Heath suddenly raised his head like a staunch hunter that sniffs the game, and starting up from his kneeling posture beside the cot, he rushed to the window and looked out, and then darted from the cell. And in less time than it will

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

take to write the words, he was heard hastening up the stairs, and dragging something along the lobby. And the next instant he appeared at the door, his complexion livid, his eyes blazing, his arm nerved by fierce anger, his hand upon the collar of Dr. Horne, whom he literally dragged, trembling, cowering, and almost unresisting, into the cell.

Forcing him to the side of the cot, he pointed to the lifeless figure and said—

"*There, murderer,* look upon your work!"

"Madman! let go my collar!" gasped the strongly-agitated man, feebly struggling.

But the hand that was upon him was like the hand of a giant.

"Look upon your work!" he repeated, in a hoarse whisper; "and after this looking, for *you*, and from *me*, there will be yet another—'a fearful looking for of judgment!'" and tightening his grasp, he raised and hurled the miscreant with such force from the cell that he fell prostrate upon the floor of the lobby.

Those who beheld this scene, regarded it with breathless amazement. That Dr. Horne, a fine, athletic man, should have suffered himself to be dragged like a slave to the cell of his victim, held there and forced to look upon her, and then hurled like a dog through the door; that his face should have blanched, his teeth chattered, and his frame shake, so as to leave him powerless in the grasp of his enemy—was incomprehensible. They looked after him, saw him lift himself from his humbled position, and heard him mutter, "He is mad; he need not be minded," as he slunk away from the spot. They could not understand it.

After the delay of several hours, consumed in the usual medical investigations, the body of Alice was pronounced quite dead, and given up to the disposal of her friends.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A CASE OF CATALEPSY.

TO avoid annoyance from the curiosity of the crowd, it was arranged that the body of Alice Heath should be removed under the shadow of night from the prison to the house of her husband.

Accordingly, at ten o'clock, when all the village was still, the fair form of the unfortunate girl, arrayed in its grave clothes, was tenderly deposited in a coffin, reverently borne out, and placed in the hearse that waited before the gate, and slowly driven down the street towards the doctor's dwelling.

Francis Heath, broken in heart and crushed in spirit, walked mournfully with uncovered head beside it until it reached his own door.

Then the coffin was taken out of the hearse, and reverently borne into the house, deposited upon a table in the centre of the front room on the left-hand of the entrance-hall, and directly opposite the furnished parlour, to which Alice, as a "mourning bride," had been first introduced.

This room was very nearly bare of furniture, but the care of the old housekeeper had kindled a fire and placed chairs around the hearth for the watchers.

When the bearers of the coffin had placed their precious burden on the table, they looked at the heart-broken young husband for further orders.

"I thank you, there is no more that you can do to-night. The funeral will move from this house to Gwyn Old Church on Monday. Request your master to call on me here to-morrow morning for further instructions," said the doctor.

The undertaker's men bowed in silence and withdrew, leaving the bereaved alone with his dead.

The room was dimly lighted by the fire that smouldered in the grate and the two sperm candles that burned upon the mantelshelf.

The coffin, as I said, was placed upon the long table in the centre of the room, with its head towards the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

front window and its foot towards the fireplace. The coffin-lid had been adjusted to its place, but was not finally screwed down.

By the light of the mantel-candles Francis Heath approached the coffin and turned down the lid to indulge his sorrow with one more look upon the fair face of his dead wife.

There she lay, her pure, pale forehead crowned with its "aureole of ebon locks," her slender, black eyebrows gently arched, her sweet eyes closed, until the long black lashes lay like ink-lines upon her white cheeks, her delicate, full lips sadly shut, and her fair hands meekly folded on her patient bosom.

The vision overwhelmed her husband, who threw himself on the coffin, and gave way to a bitter paroxysm of grief, exclaiming—

"Oh, my broken lily! Oh, my murdered love! my murdered love!" with other expressions of wild despair.

Long and bitterly he sobbed and groaned, until the storm of sorrow, exhausted by its own violence, left him still and mute, kneeling beside the coffin, with his head bowed upon the breast of the dead.

He remained thus until he was recalled to himself by a hand laid gently on his shoulder, and a voice saying kindly in his ear—

"Master Francis."

It was his old housekeeper that stood with motherly solicitude beside him.

"Is it you, Martin? Well, what do you want?" said the heart-broken man, raising his head.

"Master Francis, you are a physician and a Christian; and as both, you ought to know that it is neither good for the body nor the soul to give way to grief and despondency. Moderate grief is natural: but yours is extravagant. Is death such a strange thing that a Christian man should break his heart and craze his brain about it? Men lose their wives, and women lose their husbands, aud both lose their children by death every day;—such is the will of God that cannot be withstood; but they do not lose their reason too."

"Ah, Martin, but this is no ordinary death. This

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

is the work of wicked men; she has been martyred. No, this is no ordinary visitation of God, to which one feels he must submit."

"On the contrary, I think it *is* a distinct visitation of God, made in great mercy. Persecuted as she was, poor dear child, delivered over to the strong arm of law, from which even her husband could not deliver her, was it not well that the Lord himself set her free by death? Look at the heavenly calm on this sweet pale face," said the housekeeper, approaching, and turning down the covering. "When did you ever see this face look so serene and quiet? Nothing can disturb her more; she has gone "where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest," concluded the good woman, reverently covering the beautiful dead face.

"'Where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest,'" repeated the young man, in a voice of reverential tenderness; "and no sufferer on earth ever more needed such a refuge. This was what she sighed for, prayed for. But woe, woe to those who have hunted the poor fawn to her grave!"

"The Lord who has taken her into His rest will deal with them in His own time; leave them to Him. And now, Master Francis, it is fitting I should know who is to watch to-night?"

"I myself! I will never leave her until the grave hides her from me."

"Master Francis, you will never do such a thing. It is very wrong so to tax your firmness. Think of the lonely watches of the night; think what your feelings must be, left here in solitude and silence beside your dead? You cannot go through with it; your very reason will be endangered,'" urged the housekeeper.

"Martin, I trust that I am stronger than your doubts would make me believe. At any rate, I am resolved to watch to-night by the dead body of my Alice," replied the young man, in a tone that would admit of no further dispute.

"At least, Master Francis, come out and take some-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

thing; your supper has been laid in the parlour for the last two hours."

"No, no, I cannot eat; do not trouble me, good Martin."

"Ah, sir, but to keep up your strength."

"Do not worry me, Martin; there, it is time for you to go home. Good-night."

"Master Francis, I shall not leave the house to-night," said the old woman firmly.

"Well, do as you like, good Martin, only leave me with my dead."

With a sigh the housekeeper withdrew, but presently afterwards returned, bearing a cup of coffee in her hand, which she urged upon the sufferer with such affectionate solicitude that, to get rid of her importunities, he took the cup and hastily drank off its contents.

"And now, Master Francis," said Martin, as she received the cup from his hands, "I shall watch by the kitchen fire in case you should want refreshments. And so I will not intrude on you any longer, but bid you good-night."

"Good-night, good-night, Martin; you are a good woman, and I thank you, but I am best alone."

And Martin softly withdrew, leaving the bereaved young husband as he wished to be, alone with his dead wife.

It was now about half-past eleven o'clock; the fire smouldered dully in the grate, and the candles burned but dimly on the mantel-piece. The room was in semi-obscurity, but its very gloom, so congenial to his mood, had an almost soothing effect upon his lacerated feelings.

He drew forward an arm-chair to the side of the coffin, and sat down with his face towards the veiled face of the dead. He heard Martin close up the parlour and pass into the kitchen, closing the door behind her. That was the last sound that he heard, for after that, all, both within and without the house, was as silent as the grave.

The mourner sat beside the corpse, sunk into that still and mute despair that followed his first wild burst of

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

sorrow. She for whom he loved to live and labour was dead—dead in her youth, beauty, and innocence; driven to death by the hands of wicked men, and his own heart seemed dying in his bosom.

Henceforth, for him the world had no high ambitions, life no bright hopes.

One purpose only made itself felt in his benumbed heart—to unmask and bring to justice the atrocious wretch whose machinations and perjuries had destroyed the reputation, liberty, and life of a most innocent and most beloved wife.

"Yes, he would live to investigate that dark mystery, to vindicate the honour of his lost Alice, and bring her destroyer to justice.

And then he would leave for ever the dread scene of his unspeakable sorrows, and, in some far-distant clime, seek to dull the achings of his own heart by ministering to the heartaches of others, and so wear out his life in works of charity.

Long, long he remained plunged in this deep despair, through which, as spectres move through shades, his gloomy thoughts moved.

Meanwhile, the smouldering and the unsnuffed candles sent forth dull and fitful gleams of light, that caused the shadows to rise and waver, mop and mow upon the walls like evil spirits mocking human woe, and adding to the weird sombreness of the dread dead-watch. So the hours of the night passed on.

At length, with an insatiable hunger of the heart to behold the features of his beloved, the young man slowly arose, and once more uncovered the face of the dead, murmuring—

Sweet, sweet face! oh, my darling, whither now has fled the pure spirit that lately looked forth from those closed eyes, spoke with those mute lips? Whither, oh! whither? Ah, my Alice! could I but draw the veil that hides the invisible from mortal eyes as easily as I draw this from your face! could I gaze but for an instant on your sainted spirit as I gaze now upon its beautiful clay! could I indeed see with my own eyes that you are really living and blessed in some brighter

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

sphere; methinks I might be resigned—knowing that it is well with you—to drag out the remainder of my pilgrimage alone on earth. But, oh! mystery of death! mystery of mysteries! who shall solve it."

He remained gazing a long time in silence upon the beautiful, calm face, and then once more murmured—

"Is it well with you, my beloved? Is it well with you, my Alice? Oh! that you could answer! Oh! that your spirit could speak to me! It may not be; we die and make no sign! We enter, each one alone, into the great secret, and send no token after us. And this cold clay is all that is left of you, my darling, my darling! and even this in a few short days must be hidden from my sight. Let me gaze upon it while yet I may! While yet I may, let me press my lips to yours! Would they could breathe into yours my own breath of life!"

And stooping down he pressed his lips to hers. Why did he start back and gaze like one bereft of his senses? Why did he murmur to himself—

"Oh, it is just as old Martin said, this watch has been too much for my reason; my very senses play me false."

The lips that he had pressed were warm and elastic!

He next started from his panic-stricken attitude, rushed to the mantel-shelf, seized and snuffed the candle, and darted to the side of the coffin.

Holding the candle so as to throw its full light upon the face within, he gazed intently upon it.

That face had changed its aspect within the hour. The lips were warm and red, as with returning life; the cheeks were faintly flushed; the eyes were half-unclosed, and soft and bright, as with a semi-consciousness of light. He gazed upon that face for a moment, while his heart beat so thick and fast that it threatened to suffocate him. He lifted one of her hands; it was warm and limber, and remained in his as if half-sensible of the hold.

Then the truth rushed upon him with the force of an electric shock.

She was not dead! she lived!

This was one of those cases of catalepsy, or apparent

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

death, of which he had met so many in his medical readings, though he had never before seen one in his whole practice.

"Not dead! not dead! Oh, my God I thank Thee!" he cried, in a transport that shook his whole frame.

Nothing but the imminent necessity of collecting and concentrating his faculties for this great crisis; of rendering instantaneous aid to Alice, to fix the fluctuating flame of life that might even yet expire; and of providing at once for her present and future security, could have enabled Francis Heath to conquer the storm of emotions in his own breast, and address himself promptly to the work of resuscitation.

His heart still beat fast and thickly with the contending passions of astonishment, rapture, and terror —astonishment at the unexpected revival; rapture in the thought that Alice still lived; and terror in the possibility that she might again speedily sink into death or live only to languish out her days in a prison.

First to save her life, and then to secure her flight and provide for her safety. These imminent necessities pressed upon his heart with a force that calmed its wild throbbings, if it did not even stop the current of blood.

All these rapid thoughts and emotions passed in one minute from the instant at which he had discovered her to be alive, for no more time did Francis Heath spend in inaction.

First he glided swiftly and silently to the door of the kitchen, where Martin watched. He listened, and found by her deep breathing that the old woman was fast asleep in her chair. Then he sped silently back to the room of death, and carefully and tenderly lifted the light body of Alice from her premature coffin, and carried her upstairs and laid her upon the bed. It was but the work of a moment to take off the frightful winding-sheet and shroud, and to wrap the chilled form in a white flannel dressing-gown. There was a smouldering fire in the fire-place, the side bricks of which were old and worn.

Francis Heath did not hesitate to take the poker

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

and force out three or four hot bricks from the mouldering sides to wrap up in woollen clothes, and apply to the feet, knees, and shoulders of the cold form, as the speediest means of relief.

Then from his medicine closet in the right hand of the chimney, he procured hartshorn, with which he briskly rubbed her temples and the palms of her hands, occasionally stopping to apply it to her nostrils. While thus engaged in trying to bring her back to full life and consciousness, he was hastily revolving in his mind whether he should take old Mrs. Martin into his confidence, or find some pretext to dismiss her from the house, so as to leave him a clear field for his operations.

A little reflection, however, was sufficient to convince him that he would never be able to conceal Alice without the assistance or connivance of a third party; and there was no one in the world so likely to give him assistance and to keep his counsels as the old servant of his family, who had been devoted to him from his infancy, and had followed all the varying fortunes of his orphan boyhood and youth with unflinching steadfastness, and whose sympathies had been recently so deeply interested in the fate of his unhappy young wife.

In a word he determined to trust Mrs. Martin with his precious secret.

But for the present he would not leave Alice; her life was flowing slowly back. Her heart fluttered faintly, and her lungs trembled with the shock of the returning tide; then her fair face quivered, and her dark eyes slowly opened and stared into vacancy.

"Alice—Alice, love!" said her husband, addressing her in a low cautious voice.

The staring eyes lowered their glance to the level of his face, and softened into consciousness as they recognized him.

"Alice, dear, Alice! how is it with you?"

"Is it you, Francis, dear, only friend?" she murmured softly, keeping her eyes fixed upon him.

"Yes, dear Alice; how are you?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"I—do not know; where am I?" she asked, with a bewildered look.

"You are in your own room at home, sweet Alice, and I am by your side," said Francis Heath, tenderly.

"Yet, I fell asleep in my cell. How came I here?"

"Your sleep was very sound, sweet Alice, and you were brought here during its continuance."

"And would they let you do that? Oh, I was condemned, you know, and was to be sent——" She paused, and grew deadly pale, that her husband became seriously alarmed, but composing himself, he answered, calmly—

"Fear nothing, dear Alice, you are free! Nothing can harm you more."

"Free! free! Did the pardon come at last?" she inquired, eagerly.

"The order for your liberation came last night, dear Alice—(from God)," mentally added the young man.

"Free! free! oh, thank—thank Heaven!" exclaimed the poor girl, bursting into tears of joy.

"But how is it with you, dear Alice? Are you in any pain? Is it difficult for you to speak?"

"Oh, no, no; I am at ease, and so happy—so happy to be free, to be with you."

"But you are weak!"

"Oh, I feel faint and light; but that is nothing. I am so—so happy."

He went to his medicine closet and poured out a cordial, which he caused her to drink. Then he arranged her pillows, and said—

"Now, can you rest here quietly, dear Alice, while I go below to give some directions?"

"Oh, yes, I shall lie here, and return thanks to the Lord for my deliverance. But how strange it was that I should have slept so soundly as to be brought here without being awakened," she said, wonderingly.

"It was the deep sleep of an exhausted mind and body, dear Alice, so think no more about it, love," said Dr. Heath, tenderly smoothing her dark hair before he left the room.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

CHAPTER XL.

BOUND TO SECRECY.

HE went downstairs to arouse the old housekeeper, and to confide to her the wondrous secret of his wife's resuscitation. When he entered the kitchen, he found the good woman still sleeping in her arm-chair in the corner. He shook her gently, saying—

"Martin, Martin, wake up, good woman."

She started and rubbed her eyes, exclaiming—

"Is it you, Master Francis? What a night you must have had. What would you like? I will make you a cup of tea directly."

"Come into the parlour with me, Martin, I have something particular to say to you," replied the young man, gravely.

The housekeeper arose and followed her young master.

The parlour was just what it was described to be when poor Alice was first brought home.

The sofa was drawn up on the left hand side of the fire-place, in which burned a low fire. An easy chair stood on the right hand side, and the table, with its untasted supper, occupied the centre of the room.

"Sit down here a moment, Martin, I wish to talk with you," said the doctor, indicating the sofa.

The old woman obeyed, looking at the speaker with curious interest.

"Martin," said Dr. Heath, seating himself beside her, "have you ever in your life heard of a case of suspended animation?"

"Sir!"

"Have you ever, then, heard of a case of apparent death?"

"'Apparent death,' Master Francis?"

"Yes, have you ever known an instance of a person lying apparently dead for hours and then recovering?"

"Lord preserve your reason, Master Francis! I have heard of such things, but I never knew a case of the kind in my whole life. What puts such strange notions

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

into your head? Oh, I said this death-watch wasn't good for you," sighed the old woman, uneasily.

"Those cases of suspended animation, apparent death, or catalepsy, are well known to us of the medical profession, though unfrequent," said the doctor, while the old housekeeper continued to gaze upon him uneasily.

"Such a case, Martin, has recently come to my knowledge—a case that interests me more nearly than my own life. You have heard that your young mistress died suddenly, or rather that she was found dead in her bed yesterday morning?"

"Yes, yes, Master Francis. In the name of heaven, what is it that you are going to tell me?"

"While I watched by the side of my young wife tonight I thought I detected in her signs of returning animation. A further examination proved my suspicions to be correct. In a word, Martin, hers was a case of apparent death only, and she lives," said the young man, in a voice broken with emotion.

"Oh, Master Francis, can this be possible!" cried the old woman, trembling with agitation.

"It is true as that I stand here. I took her from her coffin, bore her up stairs, laid her on the bed, and removed the cerements of the grave from her sight before I brought her to the consciousness of surrounding circumstances. She is awake now, but knows nothing of her supposed death and intended burial. She thinks that she has been pardoned, and has been brought here while in a deep sleep; and she must never know any better."

The housekeeper could only stare at him in unutterable astonishment.

"And now, Martin, attend to me. I do think you love me?"

"I took you from your dear lost mother's breast when she died, Master Francis; I nursed you at mine, and I love you as my own son."

"I know you do; and I think also that you love the poor, innocent, unhappy girl whom I made my wife?"

"I do, indeed, poor dear."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"And you would do anything in your power to save her from the dangers that surround her?"

"Indeed, heaven knows that I would," said the housekeeper, fervently.

"Then, Martin, first of all you must swear that you will never divulge to a living creature the secret that I have told you to-night—the secret of my wife's recoved life."

"May my body and soul perish the day that I divulge your secret, or do the least thing to betray you or her," said Martin, clasping her hands.

"I trust you, else I had never told you so much as I have; nevertheless, Martin, I should rather you would bind yourself by a formal oath," said Dr. Heath, taking a copy of the Holy Scriptures from the book-shelf, and presenting it to the housekeeper.

"Dictate the oath to me, Master Francis, and I will take it, though it cannot make me more faithful to your trust than I am already, for I am now as true and as devoted to you as ever was a mother to her son."

"I do not doubt you, my good Martin; but I do not know to what extremities you may be forced by some judicial investigation. Therefore I would have you bind your soul by an oath that you cannot, dare not break," said the young man, placing the Holy Bible in her hand, and dictating the form of the oath.

"I hope that satisfies you, Master Francis; but as for me, you might have trusted me without it, for wild horses should not have drawn the secret from me," said Martin, when she had taken the oath.

"And now go quickly and prepare some nourishment for your mistress, and take it to her, while I find something with which to fill the empty coffin, which must be screwed down before any one comes to the house," said Francis Heath.

They separated about their several errands. Mrs. Martin went into the kitchen to prepare a basin of wine-whey; and Francis Heath passed out of the back door, and sought an old lumber-shed, where he found a log that suited his purpose. Bringing this into the house, he wrapped it first in a woollen table-cover,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

and then in a sheet, and placed it in the empty coffin, where he carefully fitted it, and closely covered it with a second sheet, tucking in the ends, to make all tight. Then he replaced the lid of the coffin and screwed it securely down. He next raised it and satisfied himself that the muffled log did not shake about, and that its weight nearly corresponded to that of the body it replaced.

He then put the room in order and locked it up.

He next went up-stairs to visit Alice, who, refreshed by a wash, a change of clothes, and a basin of wine-whey, was now lying comfortably in bed, enjoying a light and easy slumber.

Perceiving this, he beckoned Mrs. Martin to follow him, and led the way down stairs to the parlour, where they sat down for further consultation.

"You must know, Martin, that I have put a muffled billet of wood of a good size in the coffin, and screwed it securely down. This will be supposed the dead body of your mistress, and the funeral must proceed as previously arranged. No one but you and myself must suspect that she has been really resuscitated and is now living."

"I understand that, sir."

"And when she is believed to be dead and buried we must take her off in the night to some place of concealment, where she may remain in safety until we can get her out of the country.

"Yes, sir, I see all that is necessary; but where can we take her?"

"That is what I have been thinking of, and wished to consult you upon. Is your old cottage in Horne's Hole let yet?"

"Lord, no sir; ever since the murder of old Hugh Horne, and the finding of the clothes in the rock behind the hut, you couldn't get a living soul to go near it, much less live in it. The little place used to bring me in a good ten pound a year, and now it is as good as gone to me."

"Let me see—that cottage I think is far removed

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

from any human habitation, except the deserted house of Horne's Hole?"

"Yes, sir; it is quite on the verge of the estate, a good mile from the Hall, and, indeed, it is nearer to Radnor; but Radnor is on the other side of the mountain, where there is no pass."

"It is the very house for me. Is the furniture still in it?"

"Lord, yes, sir; such as it is—plain stuff—all just as I left it when I came here to take care of this house."

"Then there we will go with our precious charge. I know that, however plain it may be, your furniture is clean and comfortable; and to your house will I take Alice, and leave her in your care until I can withdraw her from the country. Being supposed dead and buried, there at least she can remain in concealment and safety. And now let us have a little breakfast, and address ourselves to the day's business."

"The kettle is boiling, sir; and you shall be served in five minutes," said the housekeeper, hurrying to lay the cloth.

Dr. Heath, meanwhile, slipped up-stairs to take another look at Alice. Finding her in a deep, healthful sleep, that was likely to last for hours, he locked the door securely on the outside, put the key in his pocket for safety, and returned below to open the house.

The sun was now rising, and the world was all astir; and Mrs. Martin had his breakfast ready in the parlour.

After the morning meal, the doctor, with many fresh charges of secresy and discretion to his housekeeper, went into the opposite room to await the coming of the undertaker.

That functionary soon presented himself. After the usual lugubrious salutations, Dr. Heath said—

"In view of the distressing circumstances that attended my dear wife's fate, of course it is desirable that the funeral shall be as unostentatious as possible."

"Of course, of course," groaned the undertaker.

"To-morrow, therefore, attended by the two carriages requisite to convey the clergyman, myself, and the pall-bearers, it will proceed from this house to Gwyn Old

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Churchyard, where I directed you to have a grave prepared. I believe this is all I have to say. The details I will leave to your own discretion."

"I will attend to everything with the greatest care and dispatch. And now I will not prolong a painful interview, or intrude upon you longer," said the undertaker, rising to go.

After his departure, Dr. Heath fastened up the front door, and had the house to himself and his small family for the rest of the day. He went frequently to the door of Alice to listen if she was awake. At last, towards midday, hearing her stir, he unlocked and entered the room.

Finding her much restored by her healthful sleep, he made her partake of a basin of chicken broth, and then sat down beside the bed to converse with her.

"Oh, Francis," she said, as the housekeeper had left the room, "the last few weeks seem to me like a dreadful dream, from which I have awakened, or a horrible brain-fever from which I recovered—to be lying here in my own comfortable bed, with you sitting by my side, and with good Martin coming in and out to do me service, and with none but kind looks and kind words around me—to have no fear of evil men or anything that can hurt me! Ah, Francis, it is like passing from the torment of purgatory to the peace of paradise. It is like entering the heavenly gates!" she finished, with the sigh of a great deliverance.

He smiled on her, and smoothed her hair with his hand. Not for the world would he have hinted to her that she had really passed through the valley of the shadow of death to reach this rest and peace, or that her danger was not really past; that at any hour in which her existence might be casually discovered she was liable to arrest and imprisonment to serve out the term of her sentence.

No, she had naturally adopted the opinion that she had been pardoned and liberated, and not for the universe would he have disturbed her peace by telling her the contrary.

"Dear Francis," she continued, with a smile of

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

seraphic peace, "I feel so much lighter and more hopeful since I am free; for though the pardon has not cleared me from the imputation of guilt, yet I feel sure in my own mind that I shall not long suffer under it. That man's conscience, seared as it is, cannot rest under the weight of so heavy a crime as that he has committed against me. It will force him to confess his own guilt and clear me. I feel as sure of what I say as I do of the existence of God."

"I do believe, dear love, that in the Lord's own time your innocence shall be made as clear as day," replied Dr. Heath, caressing her brow with his hand, "but in the meantime, my beloved Alice, you must not stay here amid scenes associated with so much injustice, persecution, and misery. You must keep quietly in bed for a couple of days to prepare you for the fatigue of a journey. I intend to take you to a quiet, secluded cottage among the mountains, where you are to remain to recruit your health for a few weeks under the care of Martin, while I settle up my business and prepare to emigrate to America. In that vigorous young republic, my Alice, I shall find a new and extensive field for endeavour. There I have no doubt I shall so rise in my profession as to attain that eminence which I covet only for your dear sake. There we shall forget all the dark troubles that we have left behind us, and commence a new existence."

"Oh, Francis," she said, with her eyes fixed in unspeakable affection on his face, "how good, and brave, and noble you are; how much I owe you; my life, and all that makes life of any worth. When I was a poor, lost girl, forsaken by all my friends, persecuted to death by evil men, falling into a horrible pit of destruction without a hand on earth to help a creature so lost and ruined—you, noble soul, believed in my innocence—you stretched forth your hand—and, though all the world cried shame upon you, you snatched me from destruction, and drew me to the shelter of your own strong, noble heart. Oh, what can I render to you for all that you have done for me, my husband? All my love was yours before—all my life would not be

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

enough. Oh, if I had my will, no one should ever wait on you but me—no hands should even wash your feet but mine. Francis! Francis!" she cried, passionately, holding out her arms.

He bowed his head to her caress, and while she held it to her throbbing heart, she burst into a passion of sobs and tears.

"Compose yourself, dear love; you are my wife, my own; I was bound to rescue you or perish with you; I would have laid down my life for your liberty; and your love, dear Alice, is more than sufficient recompense for all."

"My love, my life, my soul, would not be enough, Francis, Francis!" she cried, passionately clasping him to her breast, and dwelling on his name as if its very sound had a charm for her.

"It is enough, my love; it is enough that you love me," he said. "And now, dear one, I have a favour to ask of you."

"A favour? What is there you would ask of me that would not be a right?"

"It is for your own sake that I ask it, my darling—for your own sake only. In a word, I wish you to keep very quiet to-day and to-morrow. Do not rise from your bed to ring your bell, and do not call aloud, or even speak above a whisper. Will you promise me this?"

"Certainly I will," said Alice, with a look of surprise, that she refrained from putting into words, but which he answered by saying—

"The slightest exertion at present would be very injurious to you, my love; it is as your physician, as well as your husband, that I request this forbearance on your part."

"I will obey you in both capacities," she said, in a subdued voice, adding, with a smile, the question, "Do I speak low enough?"

"Quite, my love, and this restraint will only be required of you for a few hours."

The remainder of the day passed in quiet and soothing conversation between them.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

CHAPTER XLI.

THE MIDNIGHT JOURNEY.

THE next day, at the appointed hour, the few devoted friends of Francis Heath and Alice assembled to pay what they supposed to be the last tribute of respect to the departed.

The hearse and the two carriages were drawn up before the house.

In the front room were assembled a small party, consisting of the old curate who had performed the marriage ceremony between Francis Heath and Alice Owen, the two old ladies who had witnessed the rites, Mrs. Mostyn, Mr. and Mrs. Wardour, and lastly, Dr. Heath and Mrs. Martin.

The coffin being already screwed down, there seemed to be no possibility of detecting the pious fraud that had rescued Alice from a living death, nevertheless the heart of Francis Heath stood still with intense anxiety during the progress of the funeral solemnities.

Once his conscience smote him for keeping the secret from one who had been his friend through all his trials —it was at the end of the service, and just before the coffin was to be carried out, when Constance Mostyn bent over it, weeping abundant tears of sincere sympathy and regret. Willingly would he have dried those tears by telling Mrs. Mostyn that she for whom they were shed was living and at peace, but that he judged it better to be silent.

Constance remained at the house with the old housekeeper, while the funeral procession moved to the churchyard, and when the obsequies were quiet over, and Dr. Heath returned, she was there to tender him a sister's sympathy and services.

Again Francis Heath felt a strong temptation to tell her the truth, but again prudence prevailed over impulse, and he thanked Mrs. Mostyn earnestly for all her kindness, and suffered her to depart unenlightened.

At last, then, once more he had the house to himself for the execution of his plans for the safety of Alice.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

First, he went up stairs to speak to her from whom the solemn ceremonies of the day had kept him several hours absent.

He found her cheerful and very much restored.

"You have had some friends to see you down stairs. I heard people coming and going," she said, in the low tone that had been prescribed for her.

"Yes, dear Alice, it was a consultation; but you need not constrain yourself to speak in a low voice any longer. You are so well and strong now that you may speak as usual."

"I am very glad, for to tell the truth, I found it more fatiguing to suppress my voice all the time than to speak naturally."

"Doubtless; and now, my dear Alice, I have to propose to you to get up and dress, and prepare yourself for a night journey."

"A night journey?" she said, in surprise.

"Yes, love: the reason is,—that in our painful circumstances I do not wish to attract attention by driving through the town and along the highway in broad daylight."

She looked wistfully at him for a few moments, and then said—

"Francis, dear, let there be no secret between you and me; it costs you too much, beloved."

"Alice, Alice!" he interrupted, in a voice of entreaty, but she went on.

"Your stealthy and hurried manner; your ill-concealed agitation; your injunction upon me of silence or suppressed tones; this journey under the shadow of night, all point to a fact——"

"Alice, Alice, the hankering of a woman after forbidden knowledge first brought ruin and death unto the world——"

"I know it, but this is not forbidden knowledge, neither would I speak of it did I not already possess it, and did I not see how much pain it costs you to keep the supposed secret from me. Confess, then, that poor Alice has not been pardoned, but that her deliverer has effected her escape in some other way. Is it not so?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

His silence seemed to admit the fact; and Alice, though she had suspected this, grew pale at the confirmation of her fears.

"And these people that were coming and going downstairs were here with a search-warrant to look for me?" she said, becoming deathly white

"No, no, Alice, my door fawn, you will never be hunted again. You are safe—safe, believe me."

"I am safe, since you say so, though I do not understand how that can be, since I am not pardoned," she said, in perplexity.

She knew so much, that he judged it best for her peace that she should know all. He therefore said—

"Alice, they will never concern themselves in any way about you again, unless you choose to present yourself before them. They believe you beyond all earthly laws. You fall into a cataleptic fit, which was supposed to be death. After some investigation and some delay and formalities, during which you lay as one dead, you were given up to my disposal. I brought you here, dear Alice, and was so happy as to recover you. That is the whole truth. You have only to keep out of sight for a few days, until I can arrange my business and get you off to America."

"And that subdued bustle downstairs—I guess what it was now!" said Alice, in a tone of deep awe.

"It was a pious fraud, my love, if ever there was such a thing."

"And we must set forth to-night to seek a place of concealment?"

"Yes, dear; the cottage in the mountains, of which I told you, where you will remain under the care of good Mrs. Martin, who is the only one besides ourselves that is in possession of the secret. You are strong enough for the drive?"

"Oh, yes! and I thank you so very much for telling me everything. I shall know how to govern myself now."

Francis Heath called Martin in to assist Alice to dress and to put up the few necessaries that they

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

required to take with them, while he himself went into the back yard to make his preparations.

In the coach-house there was an old carriage, in tolerable repair, that had once been the property of Dr. Heath's predecessor, but that had been purchased with the other fixtures and movables appertaining to the premises. Dr. Heath's horses were in the stable.

Not daring in this emergency to take anyone into his confidence, or even to call in the assistance of a labourer, Francis Heath drew out the old coach, and put the horses to it. His next care was to pack into it a supply of food, wine, and candles, to last for several days. Having completed these arrangements, he went upstairs to see how Alice was progressing, and to wait the hour of setting forth.

At ten o'clock, therefore, when all the village was still, they had first a comfortable supper in the kitchen, and then Dr. Heath put out the fire and lights, locked up the house, took Alice out from the back door, where the old coach waited, placed her, well wrapped up, on the back seat, with a hot brick at her feet, put Martin in with her, mounted the box himself, drove out at the stable-gate, and so commenced their night journey.

It was about eleven o'clock, and very dark, when the coach passed down the village.

It would have been impossible for anyone at the hour to recognize Dr. Heath, disguised as he was in a coachman's box-coat, with the collar turned up and around the lower part of his face, and his hat pulled down low over his brows; and if any late passenger had chanced to recognize the coach, there was nothing in the event of the doctor's carriage being out late at night to attract attention, far less to awaken suspicion.

Thus the carriage passed unnoticed through the almost deserted streets, and took the road leading to Horne's Hole.

When they had got about a mile from the town, Francis Heath stopped and lighted the lamps of the carriage, a convenience of which he had not ventured to avail himself while still passing through the town and its suburbs, but which the difficulties of the road

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

now rendered indispensable. Those difficulties increased with every quarter of a mile as they passed through the broken country approaching the range of mountains in which their place of safety was situated.

Often Francis Heath had to get off the box and carefully lead his horses up and down the steepest of the hills.

At about one o'clock the moon arose and shed its welcome light upon their rugged way.

But even with this new aid, the care required by the roughness of the way rendered their progress so slow, that the day was faintly dawning in the east when they began to descend the perilous pass that led down into the deep and rocky glen known as Horne's Hole. Here Dr. Heath was obliged, for the last time, to get off and lead his horse down the steep and rugged road, while old Martin held her breath for fear, and Alice prayed for their preservation.

At last the foot of the mountain was reached in safety. Francis Heath remounted the box, turned the horses' heads to the right, and drove for some distance close under the ridge, until he reached a point where the mountain seemed cloven in two, the cleft forming a narrow wooded valley, at the furthest extremity of which was the cottage to which they were bound. As the mouth of this valley was thickly choked with a growth of evergreens, no carriage could by any means enter it. They were obliged, therefore, to draw up at its entrance and alight.

Francis Heath drew Alice's arm within his own, and led the way, while old Martin followed, laden with as many packets as she could carry. A walk about one-eighth of a mile through the thicket brought them to the head of the valley, where close against the junction of the mountains, and in about an acre of cleared ground, stood the solitary cottage in which they sought refuge for Alice. Nothing could be more lonely and desolate than the aspect of this dwelling, surrounded as it was on three sides by inaccessible rocks, and approached on the fourth through a thick wood.

"Have you the key, Martin?" inquired Dr. Heath,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

when they had passed through the broken gate up the grass-grown garden-walk to the door of the cottage.

"Oh, yes, sir," said the old woman, producing a large rusty key, that, being fitted to the lock, presently gave them admission to a small, narrow passage, having a room on each side.

Opening the door on the right, they entered a good-sized kitchen, plainly furnished, and with its furniture covered with the dust of many months.

Dr. Heath placed Alice in the settle beside the chimney, wrapped her carefully up, and turning to his housekeeper, said—

"It is no time for ceremony, Martin, we must make a fire with the first thing we can find for the purpose." He proceeded to break up the old chair, the fragments of which he piled upon the hearth. Then taking from his pocket the necessary apparatus for the purpose, he struck a light and kindled a fire, that soon sent its cheerful light and warmth through the damp, deserted room.

"Now, Martin, my good woman, get things into a little order here, while I go back to the carriage to fetch the remainder of the packets," said Francis Heath, leaving the cottage.

He was gone about fifteen minutes, and when he returned, so well had the good woman employed the time, that the furniture was dusted, the cloth laid for breakfast, and the kettle hung over the fire.

While waiting for the water to boil, Mrs. Martin showed Alice into the large bed-room on the opposite side of the little passage, where she laid off her bonnet and wrappings.

Meanwhile, Francis Heath went out and gave his horses a feed.

When he returned, a comfortable breakfast of coffee, toast, ham, and eggs was ready upon the table.

He would not permit Alice to stir from the arm-chair, but drew her, seated as she was, to the side of the table nearest the fire.

With an almost motherly care he selected the nicest slice of ham, and the clearest poached egg, and the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

most delicate piece of buttered toast for her plate, and said, smiling—

"Now, dearest Alice, whether you are hungry or not, if you care for me, you will eat. An indolent appetite should no more be indulged in its apathy than a greedy one in its voracity; both extremes are bad, and should be governed by reason."

And with his own hand he placed a cup of fragrant coffee beside her plate, and waited to see her commence eating before he would touch his own breakfast.

More to please him than to satisfy herself, Alice drank a little coffee, and put a morsel of ham to her lips; but she soon found as he had said, that with the tasting of food her torpid appetite revived, and with it her depressed spirits were raised. She made a good breakfast, and the meal passed off cheerfully.

When breakfast was over, and the table cleared away, Dr. Heath sat himself down beside Alice's arm-chair, and called Mrs. Martin to join them, as he wished to take her into their consultation.

When the fatigued housekeeper had gladly sunk into a seat on the other side of the doctor, the latter said—

"Now, my dear Alice, and my good Martin, I must hurry away as soon and as fast as I can, therefore I want you to attend to the directions I have to give you for your safety."

"Must you indeed go so soon, sir?" inquired Martin, while Alice looked pleadingly into his face, but said nothing.

"Yes, unfortunately, yes; I must go for many imperative reasons. In the first place—secluded and unfrequented as this pass is, I dare not leave my carriage at its entrance, lest some early passenger might chance to come this way, and see it."

"And, oh, dear! to think that there is no room to get it into the thicket and hide it," said Martin, with a groan.

"No; but when I return I will come on horseback, for I can bring a horse quite through the thicket, and put him into the shed behind the cottage. But there

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

are other, and even more exigent reasons, why I must return at once. It is necessary that I should show myself at Gwyn as early as possible to-day, so that I shall not be missed and my absence commented upon. I must by every care, avoid attracting attention and inquiry. Why do you look so sad, sweet Alice? There is no danger, love; only a need of prudence for awhile," said Francis Heath, affectionately taking her hand.

"It is not that, dear Francis; it is not that. I am thinking of the care and trouble I am to you," she answered, with tears suffusing her dark eyes.

"Think not of that, love; it is care and trouble willingly undertaken; think not of it, it is only for a season; think of the comfort and happiness you will be to me for long years after we shall have attained the refuge of another country. And now, dear one, I must bid you farewell for the present; but one word before I go. Lonely as this cottage is, and unlikely as any stranger is to approach it, still, for your safety, I must beg that you will not show yourself outside the door, or even at one of the windows? Can you forbear so much, sweet Alice?"

"Oh, yes. You delivered me from a close prison; then from a grave; can I not bear the light restraint you enjoin upon me?"

"'Twill be but a few days, dear Alice. Martin," he said, turning to the housekeeper.

"Yes, sir."

"I look to you to watch over the safety and welfare of your mistress. Keep the window-sashes fastened down, and keep light curtains drawn before them so as to exclude the view but not the light. Keep every door fastened, and if any one by any unforeseen possibility should come to the cottage, let your mistress lock herself in her room before you open the cottage door. Now, Martin, be sure to attend strictly to these instructions."

"I will indeed, sir. You may depend upon everything being done as though you saw it yourself."

"If any of the country people should chance to hear that you have returned, and should come to see you,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

take the precautions that I have ordered for the concealment and security of your mistress, and then explain your return by saying that you have come back upon account of your master's resolution to break up his establishment and go to foreign parts."

"Which will be the truth as far as it goes, sir. But I think that there is not the least reason to fear any one coming near the cottage. It is so out of the way, that in the best of days no one ever came more than half-a-dozen times a year. And after the murdered man's clothes were found in the cleft of the rock behind the shed no one ever came near the place. Dr. Horne's place is right opposite to this, against the other side of the mountain, it is true; but then the mountain is perfectly impassable here, you know; and for anybody at Radnor to get here they would have to come about a mile and a half around."

"Yes, yes," said Francis Heath, who could not endure the least reference to Dr. Horne, especially in the presence of Alice. "Yes, yes, I do believe you are perfectly safe; nevertheless, to make assurance doubly sure, do just as I direct you."

"You may rely upon me, sir."

"And now, my dear Alice, farewell in earnest though only for a few hours. I shall be with you again early to-morrow morning."

And after tenderly embracing his wife, and shaking hands with Mrs. Martin, Dr. Heath left the cottage and took his way down the narrow glen.

CHAPTER XLII.

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF ALICE.

IT was a glorious morning, one of those mornings that sometimes come to brighten the gloom of winter, making it gladder than the spring. The clear blue dome of heaven seemed raised to an infinite height; the newly-risen sun shone dazzlingly down upon

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

mountain and valley, wood and waterfall. One might almost fancy he heard amid the crisp rustling of the frosted trees and the merry ripple of the streams, the voices of wood-nymphs and water-spirits singing in their glee. It was a morning to cheer the saddest heart, and to intoxicate the gayest.

Francis Heath was singularly sensitive to the influences of nature, and at any other time his soul would have sung within him in unison with the concert of gladness around.

But now, as he left behind him the cottage that contained his concealed wife, his heart sunk under an oppression of spirits much greater than the occasion explained. A deep presentiment of approaching woe and irremediable calamity overshadowed his soul. In vain he tried to dispel the gloom and throw off the weight that darkened and burdened his bosom.

"She is safe"—thus he reasoned with his feelings —"perfectly safe. No one suspects her existence, so no one will ever think of pursuing her. The cottage is secure and secluded. It is next to impossible that any one should approach this vale, or, if they did, should recognize or even see her. And yet—and yet——"

He paused for a moment, and then turning and quickly retracing his steps, went back to the cottage.

He passed into the little wooden gate, and looked curiously at the front of the house. There was but one door, with a window each side of it, the right hand window being that of the kitchen, the left hand one that of the bed-room. They were thrown into deep shadow by a stooping shed over the rude porch in front of the cottage, and white curtains were drawn in the inside to exclude the gaze of any creature that might chance to be without.

"They have obeyed my instructions thus far," said Francis Heath, as he stepped into the porch and knocked at the door.

A delay of some minutes ensued, and then the door was opened by Mrs. Martin, who, looking hurried and alarmed, exclaimed—

"Good gracious! is it you, Master Francis? How

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

you frightened me! I thought it was some stranger. Have you forgot anything?"

"No; I came back to reiterate my cautions about the safe keeping of you mistress."

"Lord! Master Francis, can't you trust me?"

"Yes; but I wish to give you some additional instructions for the security of Alice. I wish you to make up a second bed in her chamber and sleep there to-night."

"I intended to do that, sir, anyhow."

"Where is your mistress? I must see her for a moment."

"Locked in her room, sir, as you ordered if ever a rap should come to the door."

"Right," said Dr. Heath, passing into the passage, rapping at the left hand door, and saying—

"Alice, my dear, it is I come back to speak to you a moment. Let me in."

The door was opened by Alice, who looked pale with fear.

"I have alarmed you, my love," he said.

"I thought it was some one else," faltered Alice.

"I came back to give a few more directions to Martin, and to hear you promise again not to leave the house for a moment during my absence."

"I will not cross the threshold of my door until I see you again. I pledge you my word and honour that I will not; so trust me and be satisfied, dear Francis," said Alice, earnestly.

He did trust her, but he was not satisfied. And so he made her reiterate again and again her promise not to leave the house, nor even to appear at a door or window, until she should see him again.

And then he kissed her once more, commended her to the protection of heaven and the care of Mrs. Martin, and for the second time took his leave and departed.

This time he hurried rapidly down the wooded glen, threw himself into his carriage, and—the horses being now refreshed by a feed and a rest—drove as fast as the difficulties of the way permitted towards the mountain-pass leading to the road to Gwyn, where he arrived without notice, about mid-day. He put up his carriage

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

and horses, refreshed himself with a cold luncheon and a glass of wine, and then set out to call upon his patients, in which occupation we must leave him for a few hours while we return to the two lonely women in the glen cottage.

The forenoon was passed by Mrs. Martin in cleaning and putting into some order the small, neglected house. Alice pressed her own assistance upon the good woman, but Mrs. Martin pleaded her master's orders, and would not suffer her mistress to do aught but quietly rest in the arm-chair in the chimney-corner, only leaving it to draw up to the table at noon to partake of the boiled partridge and glass of sherry that the careful housekeeper had got ready.

The afternoon was passed in completing the work of the morning.

After an early tea, Mrs. Martin carefully secured the doors and windows of the house, covered the kitchen fire, and attended Alice to the sleeping-chamber that they were to occupy in company.

For the explanation of what is to follow it is necessary to describe this room.

It was situated on the left side of the small passage. It had but one window, a large one, which looked upon the front porch; but it had two doors, the first or side door opening from the narrow passage that divided it from the kitchen, and the second, or back door, on the left of the fire-place, opening into a small yard in the rear of the cottage, which ran back to the rocky precipice, in a cleft of which had been found the blood-stained clothes of the murdered miser. The room was very plainly furnished, having only the curtained bedstead that stood in the front corner of the room with its head against the front wall to the right of the window, a plain dressing-table, a wash-stand, a few chairs, and a small cot bedstead that stood in the recess to the right of the fire-place, where a bright little wood-fire added cheerfulness to the apartment.

The first care of Mrs. Martin on enterng the room was to assure herself by a second examination that the doors and windows were really fast.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Having satisfied herself upon these important points, she next assisted her mistress to undress and get to bed.

Lastly, she drew the curtains carefully around Alice, and leaving her to repose, betook herself to her own cot bedstead.

Exhausted by the great fatigue of the last two days and nights, Mrs. Martin fell into a deep and dreamless sleep, that lasted until late in the morning, and how much longer it would have continued is uncertain, for she was only at length awakened by a loud and prolonged knocking at the outer door, attended with a voice, calling—

"Martin, Martin! in the name of heaven, woman, are you dead or in a trance-coma?"

"Coming sir—coming immediately," answered Mrs. Martin, hurrying on her clothes, as she recognized the voice of her master.

"It's a world's wonder he had not waked up his wife," said Martin, glancing uneasily at the curtains of Alice's bed, from which no sound came. "If I slept fast, I know who sleeps faster," she added, as she hurried out into the passage, and unbarred and unlocked the front door to admit Francis Heath.

"Good Heaven, Martin, how late you sleep and how soundly. I have been rapping, and calling, and shaking, at this door for the last half-hour, I do really believe," said the doctor, impatiently.

"I was so very tired, quite worn out, sir, indeed," said the housekeeper, apologetically.

"I believe you, poor soul. You have had a fatiguing time of it," said the doctor, quite mollified. "How is your mistress?" he asked, dismounting, and passing into the kitchen.

"As well as possible, I think, sir. She sleeps sounder than I did, for even your loud knocking and calling did not awaken her," said Mrs. Martin, as she bustled about, opening the kitchen window-shutters, and then proceeding to light a fire on the hearth.

"Why, it is eleven o'clock," exclaimed the doctor. "I will go and see how my sleeping beauty fares," he

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

added, mentally, as he passed out of the kitchen, and entered the chamber of his wife.

With a half-suppressed smile upon his lips, he approached the bed, and drew the curtains, to gaze upon her as she slept. The next instant, he started back in surprise and alarm.

The bed had been slept in, but was now empty.

He glanced around the room. There was not a crevice or an article of furniture that would for a moment have hidden her from his view. He next observed with anxiety that the back door of the chamber was slightly ajar. He went to it immediately, and passed into the small back yard.

This yard was very circumscribed, enclosed in the front by the wall of the cottage, on the back by the frowning precipice, and on each side by two low stone fences. There was no out-house, no place of concealment within it, no gate or door of egress from it.

"She is not there; but I am wrong to be anxious; nothing can have happened to her. She probably grew tired of lying still, and not wishing to disturb Mrs. Martin, she arose early, and is doubtless in some part of the house," said Francis Heath to himself, as he hastily returned to the kitchen, where Martin was getting breakfast.

"Your mistress is up, she has been up some time, probably, but she is not in her room. Where can she possibly be?" he inquired of Mrs. Martin.

"My mistress up, and not in her chamber? Impossible, sir; for when I got up, nobody had left the room, for I found the door fastened securely on the inside, just as I left it when I went to bed."

"It was?" exclaimed Dr. Heath, his surprise and alarm growing every instant greater.

"Surely, yes, sir."

"And the back door?"

"I fastened it securely last night, sir."

"Did you open it this morning?"

"No, sir; I have not been near it this morning."

"And yet it was ajar! ajar, and your mistress nowhere visible! Good Heaven, woman, what is the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

meaning of this?" asked Dr. Heath, bending his brows sternly upon the housekeeper.

"Oh, good gracious, sir, don't frighten me so! perhaps she is in the back yard!" said Mrs. Martin, trembling.

"She is not! I have searched it! And you say she could not have passed through the passage door, which you found fastened," cried Francis Heath in a voice of distraction.

"Oh, sir, she might have slipped out while I was letting you in! She may have slipped up in the loft, or gone into the scullery. I will run and see; she *must* be in the house you know! It is impossible to be otherwise."

"It would seem so, indeed," said Dr. Heath, striving in vain to conquer what he supposed to be an unreasonable anxiety, as he followed his housekeeper up into the spacious loft that occupied the inside of the whole roof above both the kitchen and the bed-room. It was bare of furniture, so they saw at a glance that she whom they sought was not there.

"Don't be alarmed, Master Francis, she is in the scullery, perhaps," faltered the housekeeper, hurrying downstairs, followed quickly by Dr. Heath.

But Alice was not in the scullery. And there was not another hiding-place in the whole of the small cottage.

Dr. Heath and his old servant looked at each other in consternation.

"It cannot be possible that she got up and dressed herself, and went out for a morning walk, contrary to my prohibition and her promise; and yet I do not see what else *can* have become of her!" said the doctor, in an agony of anxiety.

"I will run into her room and see, sir," said the housekeeper, hurrying away, followed as before by the half-distracted husband.

"No, sir! see! here is her bonnet and shawl, and even her dress and under-skirts, and her very sleeves and collar, just as I took them off her last night; and here, on the dressing-table, is her black chenille net and her

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

horse-hair roller that she rolls her hair on, just where she left them last night! No, sir, wherever she is, she is in her white dressing-gown, which is also missing."

"It cannot be as you say!" exclaimed the agonized husband. "Look! search! Had she no other clothes that she might have put on?"

"Lord, no, sir; not here as yet; not another single bonnet, shawl, or dress! and look there, sir, beside the bed! there are her shoes and stockings, just as she drew them off last night! but I don't see her slippers anywhere. It must be as I said, sir! wherever she is, she must be in her flannel dressing-gown, and so she *cannot* be far off."

Dr. Heath did not stay to hear the last words. He rushed frantically out into the back yard, in the desperate hope that he might have overlooked Alice in his first search. Then hurrying back, he seized his hat and rushed out at the front door to search the narrow, wooded vale.

Up and down through the thicket he hurried, calling wildly upon the name of Alice, and bitterly reproaching himself that he had left her for an hour. But no trace of the lost one could be found in the lonely glen.

After two hours spent in that distracted search, he went back to the cottage in the vain hope that she might have returned. He found Mrs. Martin presiding over the breakfast that she had kept warm for him.

"Have you found her, Master Francis?"

"Found her! no! Has she not returned?"

"Alack! no, sir!"

He threw himself into a chair, and groaned aloud. In truth this case of disappearance was one of unexampled difficulty and distress. In any ordinary case he could have called upon his friends and neighbours to assist him in his search, and he could have advertised in the public papers. But in this case, where the lost one was a fugitive in hiding for her life and liberty, he dared not call on any one to assist him in the quest, for if any other than himself should find her, she would then be worse than lost, worse than dead!

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

As these thoughts revolved through his mind, groan after groan burst from his bosom.

"Master Francis! Master Francis! for heaven's sake don't do that! Come and have a morsel of something to keep up your strength," pleaded his housekeeper.

"What! and she abducted! arrested! or wandering somewhere in deadly peril!"

And with the impulse of wild regret and longing that drives the bereaved into the last haunts of the lost, Francis Heath started up and went into his wife's deserted chamber.

CHAPTER XLIII.

IS IT SOMNAMBULISM?

WHEN Francis Heath, in great trouble, passed into the apartment of his lost wife, he drew aside the curtains to throw himself upon the bed and give way to his passion of grief.

But the sight that met him there was such as might have called back his spirit had it been hovering on the confines of eternity.

For there lay Alice, sleeping as calmly, breathing as regularly, as though she had lain undisturbed since the night before. Indeed, it was difficult to look upon her calmly reposing form and face, and believe that she had left her bed at all. For a minute he stood, arrested by the unexpected and incomprehensible fact, in a sort of stupefaction of astonishment. But the spell was presently broken by the ecstatic joy he felt at her restoration, and, without waking her, he hurried into the kitchen, saying—

"Martin, she is found. Come here."

The housekeeper hastened at once to obey, and, full of wonder, followed him to the bedside, where he pointed to the sleeping form of Alice.

"The Lord save us!" was all that the astonished

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

woman found breath to utter as she gazed inquiringly into the face of her master.

"I know no more about how she came back than you do, Martin. I came in hither to throw myself upon the bed for a few minutes, and when I drew aside the curtains, she was lying here as you see her, fast asleep. We must wait until she wakes for an explanation of this riddle," said Dr. Heath, in answer to the wild, inquiring looks of his housekeeper.

"The Lord save us!" again ejaculated the housekeeper, who seemed incapable of varying the expression of her astonishment.

"But it is very strange that you know nothing about it, as I see by your face that you do not. It is inexplicable that you neither saw nor heard her return."

"Heaven bless us! it is like fairy-work," said the woman.

"I shall sit by the bed-side until she wakes, and you bring me a cup of coffee here, Martin," said the doctor.

And the old servant hastened to obey the wishes of her master.

Dr. Heath watched long and patiently by the bed-side of his wife, who continued to sleep serenely until late in the afternoon, when she quietly opened her eyes, and seeing her husband, said,

"You here, Francis? Why, when did you arrive?"

"Early this morning, dear; and it is now nearly four in the afternoon."

She looked at him in astonishment, saying—

"Is it possible that I have so overslept myself! Why did you not awaken me?"

"Because no invalid should ever be awakened, dear; besides, you were disturbed in the night, or at least, you were up very early this morning, and out, which was very imprudent, and very extraordinary, after your promise to me that you would not leave the house during my absence," said Dr. Heath, in a voice of gentle reproof.

She looked at him in utter amazement, repeating—

"*I* disturbed in the night? *I* up and out early this morning? Why, I have not even stirred since I lay

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

down here last night, I was so fatigued, I slept so soundly that I did not even dream?"

"Alice, what is that you tell me? When I came home this morning your bed was empty, and you were not to be found anywhere," said Francis Heath, in perplexity.

"Impossible? You could not have looked. Since I retired last night I have not moved. I do not believe I have even turned over. I certainly have not waked up until now. Ah, I see you do not believe me. Ask Martin, then; she knows that I have never stirred," said Alice, with a look of distress.

"On the contrary, my dear Alice, Martin knows that when she arose this morning you were not in your bed, nor in your room, nor in the house, nor on the premises, and that the back door, which she had carefully fastened last night, was open. Now, what am I think of that?" inquired her husband, in a vexation of spirit that might have been deep displeasure had not the misfortunes of Alice made him exceedingly tender towards her.

"On my soul, as I hope for salvation, I have never once waked up until now; and as for getting up and leaving the house, oh, Francis, do you think I would so disobey you? Or do you think that I would tell you an untruth?" said poor Alice, with her eyes full of tears.

"No, Alice, I do not. I must believe you think as you speak; and yet it is as true as heaven that you have been absent from the house several hours, no one knows where. You went unnoticed and you returned unobserved. Martin knows this as well as myself."

"And you cannot believe me, then, when I assure you that I have slept continuously through the night, and up to the moment that I opened my eyes and beheld you sitting beside me?" said Alice, bursting into tears.

"Yes, yes, my love, I do believe you. I cannot look into your truthful eyes and refuse to trust you, even against the evidence of my own senses and those of Martin. There, do not weep, love. It is some mis-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

take for which you are not to blame, and which time can only explain. For the rest, I cannot be too much rejoiced only to have you restored to me," said Francis Heath, kissing her tenderly, before he went into the kitchen to speak to the housekeeper.

"Martin," he said "She is awake."

"Lord love her heart! And what does she say about her morning walk?" inquired the old woman with interest.

"She denies ever having left her bed, or even waked up until this hour; and she evidently firmly believes what she says."

"The Lord have a care of us!" exclaimed Martin.

"It is a mystery that only time and watchfulness can solve. Meanwhile, you must not speak to her upon the agitating subject, unless she first mentions it, and then treat it as lightly as you can. Henceforth, I myself shall remain with her every night, and during the day you must never lose sight of her. Thus our redoubled care must at once keep her in safety and solve the mystery."

"If she gets away from me again she must be cunninger than I take her for," said Martin to herself.

"And now," continued the doctor, "I wish you to prepare some refreshment, and take it in to your mistress. She must not rise to-day, for though she has slept so long, she is evidently much exhausted."

And leaving these directions with his housekeeper, Francis Heath returned to the chamber of his wife, whom he did not leave again that night. Alice slept well and awoke refreshed.

Immediately after an early breakfast, Dr. Heath mounted his horse, and returned by a circuitous and unfrequented way to the town of Gwyn.

During his absence, all through the day, Mrs. Martin took care not to lose sight of her mistress.

At nightfall the doctor returned, and was rejoiced to find his wife well and cheerful; and after an early supper, as he was very much fatigued, they retired.

Having lost his rest for several preceding nights, the doctor only waited till he saw Alice in a healthful

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

slumber, and then gave himself up to repose. He was soon buried in a profound and dreamless sleep, such a sleep as a strong man enjoys, after many days and nights of watching, and harassing fatigue and anxiety. He slept like the dead until near morning, when an ill dream, a heavy sense of impending danger, and a strange, nervous shock, aroused him. He started up in bed, but so deep had been his sleep, so strange his forgotten dream, and so severe the unknown shock which aroused him, that he could not at once recollect where he was.

The old clock in the passage was striking three. Suddenly he remembered time, place, and circumstances; and at the same moment he missed Alice from his side!

To spring out of bed, strike a light, and search the room, was but the work of a minute.

But Alice was nowhere to be seen.

He flew to the back door leading into the yard. The door was unfastened and slightly ajar. He hurried into the small, circumscribed yard, and eagerly searched, but no trace of Alice could be found. Neither was there any egress from this yard by which she might have passed out.

Half distracted with anxiety, he rushed back into the house, and into the kitchen, where Martin had made up her bed, and called—

"Martin! Martin!"

"Yes, sir! What is the matter?"

"Dress quickly, and come out! Your mistress is gone!"

"Gone again! The Lord have a care of us! We're bewitched!" exclaimed the old woman, jumping up, hurrying on her clothes, and coming forth.

The most anxious search commenced throughout the house, but without success.

"She escaped through the back door of this chamber, and into that yard; and there she seems to have vanished like a spirit, for there is no egress for her bodily form!" said the doctor, in amazement and distress, pointing to the little yard, enclosed as it was with

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

high walls on three sides, and the inaccessible precipice on the fourth.

"I can't say anything about it, sir; I feel as if I was going crazy!" said the housekeeper, desperately.

"Martin, I wish you to remain in this room and watch that back door, while I search for her through the valley," said the doctor, placing a candle in a glass lantern, and leaving the cottage for the purpose.

Martin remained in the mysterious chamber, shivering with cold and fear, and muttering—

"I wish he had not left me here by myself. She's 'no canny,' as the Scotch say. She's been dead once, and well nigh buried, as I begin to think she ought to have been, for she can't be like other flesh and blood, a-vanishing in this way. She may be her own ghost for aught I know! I'm fear'd of her, with her appearings and disappearings. Oh, Lord save and protect me!" she cried, shaking with terror, as Alice, like a spirit indeed, with her pale face, streaming black hair, and flowing white garments, glided across the room and vanished within the curtains.

The terror-stricken woman had no power to approach the bed or look upon her unearthly mistress. She remained cowering in her seat, and muttering prayers to herself, until she heard the welcome sound of her master's footsteps approaching. This circumstance gave her so much courage, that when Dr. Heath entered the chamber inquiring, in a hopeless tone of voice—

"Has Alice returned?"

She was enabled to point to the bed and answer—

"Yes, sir."

"When and how?" inquired the doctor, approaching the bed and looking upon the face of his wife, who was quietly sleeping.

"As I am a living sinner, she suddenly appeared in the centre of the room, and seemed to float towards the bed, where she disappeared without saying a word," replied the housekeeper, whose greatly-excited imagination unconsciously exaggerated the truth.

"Do you mean to say that she did not come in through that back door?"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Not as I saw, sir. She suddenly appeared like a ghost in the middle of the room, and floated towards the bed, and vanished within the curtains, as I tell you! Oh, my dear, good young master, are you sure you didn't commit a great sin in taking her out of her coffin and bringiug her back to life? It may be as great a crime, for aught we know, to bring the dead to life as it is to put the living to death. She can't be right, you know; and this being half living and half dead—half a woman and half a ghost—is horrible indeed! Hadn't you better give her body Christian burial, and so lay her poor ghost?"

"You are an old fool; or rather these matters, which you don't understand, are too much for your reason. Go get yourself a good fire and a good breakfast, and leave me to the care of my afflicted wife," said the doctor.

"It is I that am afflicted with a bewitched mistress that will neither live and be nateral, nor die and be buried like other Christians," murmured the amazed housekeeper to herself, as she left the room.

Dr. Heath sat down beside the bed, and while watching the slumbers of his wife, fell into profound thought. There was but one rational solution to all this mystery, and that solution filled him with the greatest anxiety. How to meet the dangers that it inevitably involved he could not yet discover. While he sat revolving these perplexing thoughts in his mind, Alice awoke naturally and spoke—

"Up so early, dear Francis?"

"Yes, Alice; you know that I must visit my patients early this morning; but I will return the sooner to-night," said the doctor, avoiding all allusion to her second disappearance, of which she was evidently unconscious.

"Then I will get up, and breakfast with you first, for I feel quite well this morning," said Alice, cheerfully.

Dr. Heath assented, and went into the kitchen to caution Martin against mentioning the strange event of the night to her mistress. After breakfast he

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

departed, consigning Alice to the strictest vigilance of her aged attendant.

This day passed as the preceding one. The manner of Alice was so natural; she ate and drank, read and sewed so much like other women of flesh and blood, that the superstitious terrors of the aged housekeeper were gradually dispelled.

Earlier than usual in the evening Dr. Heath returned, bringing, in a portmanteau, a few changes of raiment to his wife, and in his pocket a humorous book, with which he designed to amuse her that evening by reading aloud.

When they retired to their chamber, he took care, after bolting and locking the doors, to withdraw the keys and place them under his pillow, so that Alice could not again escape from the room. And he further resolved to lie awake and watch Alice during the night. This was not difficult, as curiosity and anxiety left him little inclination to slumber. Feigning sleep, therefore, he lay still and vigilant. Alice was soon fast asleep; he heard her breathing slowly and regularly while he lay and watched. Interminably long seemed every hour. He heard the clock strike ten, and then eleven. Longer than this, however, his patience was not doomed to be tried. As the last stroke of eleven died away, he felt Alice move cautiously, and saw her rise slowly in a sitting posture, murmuring—

"He must confess! he must confess! It is of no consequence that poor Alice Owen should suffer dishonour; but the wife of Francis Heath must not, shall not rest under it! He must confess! I—I will compel him to do so!"

And throwing the cover off, she slowly arose and stood up. Knowing the danger of awakening a sleep-walker as he now knew her to be, Dr. Heath softly arose and followed her. Noiselessly she glided round to the other side of the bed, slipped her hand under the pillow, withdrew the keys that he had placed there, selected one, and glided towards the back door, unlocked it and passed out, Dr. Heath keeping close behind her with the shaded lamp that he had seized on

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

passing the mantel-piece; but when he crossed the threshold of the door Alice had vanished! Doubting the evidence of his own senses, the doctor went carefully around the little yard, scrutinizing every part of it. This was soon done. There was nothing but twelve feet of bare ground, enclosed by three high stone walls and an inaccessible precipice. There was not an article there that could have hidden a child, still less concealed a full-grown woman; and not a gate or even a gap through which she could have escaped.

"This is most inexplicable. This is something more than somnambulency, or else I am going mad! Has the earth swallowed her?" muttered Dr. Heath to himself, as he gazed around the empty yard.

"Here she vanished, and here she must appear again; therefore, here I will watch until she comes, he concluded.

He returned within the room for a moment, to assure himself that the other door and the window were fast, and then drew on his boots, wrapped himself in his cloak, and took his station, like a sentinel, at the back door, keeping his eyes fixed upon the yard. The walls were too high for any woman to scale, yet, as that seemed the only possible means of egress, he kept his attention closely fixed upon them.

No faithful sentinel ever had a more weary or anxious watch. He remained there until the clock struck twelve; shifted his position, and leaned against the right post of the door-frame, until the clock struck one; changed his attitude, and rested against the left post until it struck two; then drew himself up, yawned, stretched his limbs, and renewed his attention to the walls of the yard, when suddenly, as though she had dropped from the sky, or risen from the earth, Alice, white-robed, pale, with her dark hair flowing, and her dark eyes fixed and wide open, appeared before him.

As he started back from the apparition she glided past him, crossed the room, and disappeared as before within the curtains of the bed.

The whole thing had an aspect so unearthly, so supernatural, so ghostly, that Dr. Heath no longer

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

wondered at the excessive terror exhibited by the housekeeper in witnessing the same phenomenon. As soon as he had recovered from his panic of astonishment, he closed the door, and once more retired to rest.

But there was no more sleep for Francis Heath that night. The first part of the mystery only was solved. It was what he had already suspected.

Alice was a somnambulist.

But the last and greatest part of the mystery remained unexplained. In what manner had she vanished from that circumscribed and strongly-enclosed yard? Where had she passed the interval of her absence, and how had she re-entered without his knowledge? These were questions that chased slumber from the eyes of Francis Heath.

He resolved to watch with even greater vigilance the next night, and if Alice again walked in her sleep, to follow her so closely that she would not elude him, and by this means he felt sure of discovering her mode of egress, and tracing her to her midnight resort. These thoughts occupied him through the remainder of the night.

In the morning Alice awoke naturally and arose cheerfully to join him at breakfast. As upon the day before, he departed early, with the promise to return in the evening. But all through that day the thought of Alice disturbed his peace. He longed for the approach of night, when by redoubled vigilance he might solve her mystery. Never were the shades of evening more welcome than upon that afternoon when he turned his horse's head homeward.

Upon reaching the cottage he found the kitchen cheerfully lighted up by the wood fire and the two sperm candles, the tea-table set, and Alice seated beside it, reading aloud to Martin, who sat knitting in the chimney. No two people could present a greater contrast to each other than Alice in her usual daily avocations and Alice in her nightly wanderings. Dr. Heath was forcibly struck by this contrast, and hoped, with the coming night, to solve the mystery, and put an end forever to her ramblings.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

CHAPTER XLIV.

FOLLOWING THE SLEEP-WALKER.

AT length came the welcome hour of repose. After carefully securing the doors and windows, the family retired to rest. Francis Heath lay down, not to sleep but to watch. Alice was soon sunk in a healthful slumber. The house was very still. No sound from within or without broke the deep silence. Long and weary seemed the time to the solitary watcher. The almost irresistible inclination to sleep crept over him. He was yielding to its power, when the striking of the clock aroused him. As the last stroke of eleven sounded in his ear, Alice, as upon the preceding night, slowly arose in a sitting posture, put up her hands to her face, pushed back her long hair that rolled down a black cataract upon her shoulders, glared into vacancy with wide open, but unseeing black eyes, and muttering, "He must confess! he must confess! or nightly shall his rest be broken by the trumpet-tones of remorse; daily shall his flesh wither from his bones; his heart shrivel in his bosom, until his frame, consumed by the fires of guilt, shall sink in ashes to the grave, and his spirit be sped to those eternal flames that shall never be quenched!" And throwing off the cover, she arose and stood up, then passed around the foot of the bed to the opposite side, slipped her hand under the pillow, possessed herself as before of the keys, and glided towards the back door.

Swiftly and silently Dr. Heath arose, thrust his feet into his slippers, threw on his dressing-gown, and prepared to follow her closely. Remembering with what supernatural swiftness she had vanished from his sight on the previous night, he resolved to be on his guard. He snatched the shaded light from the mantel-piece and held it in one hand, while with the other he seized her garment just as, having unfastened the door, she was gliding through it. Keeping so close to her that she should not feel his grasp upon her white gown, he

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

followed her straight across the yard towards the precipice at the back. There, pushing aside the crowded evergreens that closed upon the chasm in the rock, she entered what seemed at first a hidden ravine. Pushing her way slowly on, and turning now a little to the right and now a little to the left, as the tortuous subterranean pass wound, she went on and on, until the first surprise and curiosity of Dr. Heath was merged in astonishment and alarm. This ravine or cavern was much longer and deeper than he had ever suspected it to be. Indeed, choked up as the mouth of the cavern was with evergreens, he had scarcely noticed it at all, or thought of it, except as the little cleft in the rock in which the blood-stained garments of the unhappy miser had been found. He did not know, he had never heard that it had any depth at all; and now it seemed in its rugged, dark, and tortuous course, to be of interminable depth or rather length. Whither did it lead? Had it any outlet?

Alice went slowly on and on, gliding up and down, right and left, as the irregularities of the narrow passage demanded. The secret of her disappearance was now revealed; she had always in leaving the yard vanished into this secret subterranean passage; but whither was she bound, and for what purpose?

Still she went on and on, now rising, now sinking; now passing to one side, now to another; and now stooping as the projecting or overhanging rocks compelled her. The anxiety of Dr. Heath was almost insupportable. Nothing but the extreme danger of awakening the sleep-walker there and then prevented him from stopping her. In following her closely, and keeping hold of her garment whenever the sudden turnings of the pass permitted, he chose the less of two evils.

Added to this consideration was a strong curiosity and interest in knowing whither this fearful night-walk through the interior of the mountain tended, and what could be the motive of the walker.

So, keeping as close as possible to Alice, and guarding his lamp carefully, Dr. Heath followed her, as she slowly wound up and down, right and left—now climb-

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

ing, now stooping, through this terrible subterranean passage. At length, after nearly an hour of this toilsome progress, the scene suddenly expanded. They had not, however, come out into the open air; that Dr. Heath knew as well from the warmth and closeness of the atmosphere as from the absence of any view of the sky.

He turned his lantern around, and discovered to his great astonishment, that they were within the foundation vaults or cellars of some large house. Stone walls and shadowy arches were all around them.

He had no time for wonder or speculation, for Alice, like a spirit, glided on before him.

He followed her through several arched compartments of the cellar to the foot of a flight of steep stairs that she began to ascend. He went after her up these stairs to their landing in a narrow passage, in which hung several dark cloaks, indicating that the house was inhabited, though the family seemed at this hour buried in deep repose.

The feelings of Dr. Heath on finding himself here were complicated and painful.

He had secretly entered a strange house in the dead of night like any burglar. What if some member of the family awakening, should discover him and shoot him as a housebreaker before he should have time to make himself known or to explain his presence? And even if no one was awakened, and he went on in safety, whither did this walk tend? What would be the end of this strange adventure. He had no time for farther reflections, for Alice had approached the back staircase of the mansion leading from this to the upper chambers; he followed her as, like a spirit, slowly and silently she glided up these stairs, to a second landing in a back passage.

Still gliding on before him, she wound through several intricate turnings, until, at the end of a short, narrow passage, she reached the door of a chamber, where, for the first time, she paused as if spellbound. Dr. Heath was at her side, waiting in the extremity of anxiety.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Just then the clock began to strike the hour of midnight.

As the last stroke of twelve died away, Alice slowly pushed open the door, revealing a lighted chamber, in which were two persons, whose pale faces and fixed eyes seemed to speak of a panic of astonishment.

CHAPTER XLV.

REMORSE OF CONSCIENCE.

TO elucidate the event mentioned at the close of our last chapter, it is necessary to go back in our history for the space of a few days.

In the world outside the narrow valley of Horne's Hole the fate of Alice Heath had been forgotten, save by the few devoted friends who had been faithful to her in her days of bitter distress and by the conscience-stricken man who had prosecuted her to destruction ; and other exciting events soon drove the memory of the lost girl, for a time, even from their minds.

First, Mr. Maraudey was, by a writ of *habeas corpus*, brought into court, to have the reason of his detention in prison re-investigated.

His friends came forward in force, both with money and counsel. His case was argued *pro* and *con* for more than a week, and created quite as great an excitement in its own way as had the two remarkable criminal trials immediately preceding it.

But on the ninth day, the judgment of the court was pronounced, discharging him from custody.

Dissenters and churchmen almost equally rejoiced in the liberation of the portly and popular priest.

Colonel North and other gentlemen of the county gave dinners in his honour. Old maids and widows made tea-parties for his delectation. Why—even the poor farm-servants gave country-dances in the barn, and got 'glorious' for the glory of 'Father O'Lordy.'

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Dr. Horne, alone, of all the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, paid no sort of attention to the lion of the day. And, in fact, every person admitted that, both upon account of his wife's recent death and his own serious indisposition, Dr. Horne might well be excused from either giving entertainments or even participating in those given by others.

The same pretext seemed to enfranchise the doctor from all other liabilities; for when, a few days after the mock funeral, Francis Heath called at Radnor, for perhaps the tenth time, to demand satisfaction of its master for the persecution of that poor, martyred girl, he was told that the doctor was confined to his bed by illness, and could not be seen.

Again and again, upon his repeating the visit, was the same answer returned, until Francis Heath for the present gave up the pursuit, and quietly but firmly 'bided his time.' Dr. Horne was now seldom seen in public, and never where there was a possibility of encountering his late student.

Meanwhile, how went the time with Gerald Mostyn and his devoted wife? and what effect had the liberation of Mr. Maraudey upon his condition and prospects?

Mr. Mostyn, still a close prisoner, under sentence of death, suffered extremely both in health and spirits, not only from confinement, but also from intolerable suspense. Constance—noble Constance! fondly soothed or faithfully shared his sorrows. Day after day they had lived in the hope that the real criminal, conscience-stricken, would have been compelled to come forward and confess the crime for which he unjustly suffered.

But as the heavy days, in their dull monotony, moved slowly past, the sickening nature of this 'hope deferred' began to tell tremendously upon the mind and body both of Constance and Gerald.

A flash of hope sprang up with the liberation of Mr. Maraudey, and the question of how far and how favourably his enlargement might affect the fate of the condemned.

That question was soon and bitterly answered. The community, upon the first startling intelligence of the

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

mysterious stranger who, under the seal of confession, had charged himself with the murder of Hugh Horne, at once asserted the innocence of Gerald Mostyn, and clamoured for his unconditional reprieve. But as time went by, and no light was shed upon the dark event, people began to wonder and speculate, and finally returned to their first faith in the guilt of the condemned.

Some expressed their belief that the stranger of the confessional was only a sham penitent, who had been hired by the friends of Mr. Mostyn to tell that tale, in the faint hope of saving his life.

Others did not hesitate to assert that the story of the penitent was itself a deception, invented by the pitiful but not too punctillious priest, for the preservation of the prisoner's life. A few stern-hearted men thought the course of the Minister in this matter weak, and hoped that there would be no further delay in carrying into effect the sentence of the law.

Meanwhile, not only close confinement, not only wearing suspense and painful misconstruction, but severe privation, was the lot of Gerald and Constance. One by one their little articles of jewellery had been sacrificed—first to pay the cost of the defence in the trial, next to remunerate the warden for a few extra comforts supplied by him ; and now that the last crown had been expended, Constance redeemed her pledge and worked for him.

He did not know it ! When through all the hours of the weary day, he saw her nimble fingers fly over some piece of delicate needlework, he would ask—

" What is it, love, that you are so busy about ?"

" Why, a lady's collar—do you not see ?" she would reply.

And he, never doubting that she was working it for herself, would investigate no further.

And sometimes when some little comfort, not down in the prison bill of fare, would grace his morning or his evening meal, and he would look up inquiringly, into her face, she would smile and answer—

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Yes, I got it; the money obtained from the sale of your watch is not all gone yet."

(This was true. Constance, the diplomate, had saved one shilling of that money, which she kept purposely, in order to be able to make just such replies to just such looks.)

In simple poverty, however severe, these two could have been happy; but this was poverty in a prison. To any prospect of toil and privation they would have looked forward cheerfully; but for them in life, loomed but one object, of blackest horror—*the scaffold*—whose dark image overshadowed them; deeper and deeper grew the gloom as time bore them onwards towards its midnight of shame and death.

The day of execution approached. It was known that the Minister would grant no second respite, and that the condemned must prepare to meet his fate; for that, without providential interposition, upon the twenty-eighth of the month his sentence would be carried into effect.

Despair overshadowed the soul of the prisoner; his wife sought earnestly to dispel its gloom. As a general rule, I think, we women are less subject to despondency, more gifted with hope, than men; perhaps it is because we have more elasticity, if less strength than our brothers.

Upon the Sabbath, when she came as usual to see him, after they had read together the morning service according to the Episcopal ritual, and had laid aside their books, he took her hand as she sat beside him on the bed, and said—

"Dear Constance, this is the last Sabbath save one, that we shall be together——"

"Not so. Oh, not so, not by many years of Sabbaths!" she answered, hope still struggling against the terrors that would have overmastered her.

"My own heroic wife, look fate steadily in the face. You have firmness enough to do so. I wish to say to you that Mr. Osborne has kindly offered *to my widow* a home at the parsonage until such time as she shall have

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

attained her majority, entered upon her estates, and is at liberty to choose her dwelling in the world."

"*I* your widow! oh, never, never! All the mercy that there is in heaven forbid it!" she answered, shuddering. "I could not survive you—no, not for a day, should you perish so—and yet I look to live many, many years!"

"Constance, why will you not see the truth? The fatal day is very near!"

"I know it. But the 'fatal' day will never come! Believe it, Gerald. For, between this day and that, one of two things will happen. Either the real criminal, whom we already know to be conscience-stricken, will be constrained to appear, or, failing that, the Minister will feel morally obliged to interpose, and save a man whose guilt even he must now doubt. Believe it, Gerald, for, on my soul, *I* believe it!"

"Aye, Constance, you 'believe and—tremble,'" replied Mr. Mostyn, who calmly endeavoured to lay aside hope for life, and prepare himself for death.

* * * * * *

While these events were transpiring in the prison, a strange, dark, wild rumour was beginning to prevail outside.

It concerned Dr. Horne. In one respect this man had not "shammed." He was indubitably ill both in mind and body. From the time of the funeral of Alice Heath his health and spirits had utterly failed.

He neglected his profession, lost much of his practice, confined himself closely to his house, and seemed fast falling into a state of confirmed hypochondria. Various were the causes assigned by the community for his deplorable condition. Some ascribed it to extreme grief for the loss of his wife—others did not scruple to attribute it to remorse for the fatal prosecution of poor Alice Heath. As time passed the health and spirits of the morose hypochondriac grew worse and worse. His profession was utterly neglected; his practice entirely lost. His time was passed in wandering through the solitary woods and among the gloomy mountain-gorges

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

around his dreary dwelling, or else brooding in his chamber.

And from that lone mansion strange rumours reached the surrounding neighbourhood. Old family domestics whispered of fearful sights and sounds seen and heard about that house. Some bolder than the rest hinted that the spirit of Alice Heath haunted the dwelling of her destroyer. Others went further still, and said that if any one should listen at his chamber-door, their morose master might be heard in the middle of the night pleading with the spirit of the martyred girl.

For some time these rumours were regarded as the romances of the servants. But at length more serious attention was given to the subject, when, one day, as Mr. Osborne was riding to Horne's Hole, to make a call upon old Mr. Hayhurst, the overseer, he was met in the depths of the forest by Dr. Horne, who was walking along and gazing wildly around. Laying his almost skeleton hand upon the bridle, he looked in the face of the rider, and asked—

"Parson, do you believe the dead can walk?"

The pastor paused in astonishment for a moment, and then answered, somewhat sternly—

"No; at least I never saw them doing so, though fools, frightened at their own shadows, and villains pursued by remorse, fancy that they do. Why do you ask me?" questioned Mr. Osborne, in astonishment.

"Because *she* does."

"Who?" again inquired the clergyman, in consternation.

"She—the dead woman!"

"Your wife do you mean?" asked Mr. Osborne, in a sort of horror.

"Hush! no, *the other one!*"

"Alice?"

"Hush, I say!—yes—she comes every night. Do you believe it?"

"I believe that you are very ill, and require medical treatment," replied the deeply-shocked pastor, gazing with pain upon the cadaverous complexion and fierce eyes of the other speaker.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"'Ill?"—hum; 'ill' has two meanings—ill, sick, and ill, sinful. Now, do you mean to say that I am very sick, or sinful?" asked the doctor, with a sardonic smile.

"Both, perhaps; and in either case you need a physician—of the soul or of the body—perhaps of both, as I said," replied the clergyman, gravely.

"A physician!—where shall I get one? Heath and myself are the only physicians in the neighbourhood. This physician," he said, clapping his hand upon his breast, "this physician cannot heal himself. And as for Heath, he had rather kill than cure me! 'Ill' indeed! 'physician,' forsooth. Good day, physician of the soul!"

And so saying, the lunatic—for lunatic Mr. Osborne had now no doubt that he was—turned, and disappeared in the woods.

The clergyman, in sorrow and amazement, went on his way to the old house at Horne's Hole, which was occupied by Mr. Hayhurst.

On arriving, he was at once shown into the sitting-room, where he found the old man alone, and suffering from rheumatism.

"I am sorry to find you so unwell, Mr. Hayhurst," said the pastor, after the first salutation had passed, and he had taken his seat.

"Yes, sir, and I am sorry to be so. It is not, however, because I am sick that I sent for you, Mr. Osborne; but to consult you about the case of my employer."

"Dr. Horne?"

"Of course, sir; I think it is time he was looked to."

"What ails him?"

"It is more than I can tell, sir; but I doubt that he is losing his mind. You might have met him as you rode along, for he has just left here."

"I did meet him."

"And did he tell you——" said Hayhurst, suddenly pausing and looking intently into the eyes of his visitor.

"He told me of some hallucinations that trouble his rest," replied the clergyman.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"And what do you make of them, sir?" inquired the farmer, anxiously.

"That he is partially deranged," answered Mr. Osborne.

"Well, sir, I fear you are right; it is a satisfaction to have my own opinion confirmed. He has been here several times, proposing to me to go home with him, and watch with him in his chamber through the night. What would you advise me, under the circumstances, to do?"

"Assuredly, Mr. Hayhurst, I should earnestly counsel you to do as he requests. Nay, I think it your imperative duty to do so."

"I am willing to follow your instructions, sir; though I cannot now see what I can do."

"Why, this—by watching him through the hours during which he fancies he sees the apparition, you can better observe the character and symptoms of the fit of frenzy that must then come upon him, and you will be prepared to give some report of his case before the proper authorities."

"And for what purpose, sir? I don't understand."

"Why, for this purpose, certainly. If he is insane, then for his own safety and well-being, as much as for that of all around him, he should be placed under restraint and medical treatment. To have this effected, it is necessary that his condition should be proved by a competent witness. Now, the farm-servants, by whom he is surrounded, are not capable of understanding his case—hence the necessity of some competent person passing time enough with him to be able to testify to his state. Do you comprehend?"

"Yes, sir; but it seems treacherous to go to his house for any such secret purpose!" said the farmer, with a dubious expression of countenance.

"Treacherous? Why should it be? Not at all! Would you have the poor, solitary sufferer grow worse for want of proper medical attendance? Or, supposing him insane, would you have him left at large to do himself or some other person a fatal injury?" inquired Mr. Osborne, with surprise.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Oh, no, sir, by no means; and looking at it in your light, it may possibly be right that I should go and do as you advise me," replied the farmer, who after some further and unimportant debate and hesitation, yielded to the force of the clergyman's arguments, and promised to follow his directions.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE HAUNTED CHAMBER.

IT was two days after this occurrence, one dark and dismal evening, when the rain came on in fitful gusts, the wind wailed in rising and falling sobs, the lightning flashed at long intervals, and the thunder muttered sullenly—an evening having all the gloom without the glory of storm—that the pastor sat alone in his study, engaged in writing his sermon for the next Sabbath morning, when there came a low rap at the door.

"Come in," said Mr. Osborne without lifting his eyes from his work.

The door opened and some one entered.

And Mr. Osborne looked up to behold, with surprise, Mr. Hayhurst, the steward, who stood before him with an aspect so pale, frightened, and woebegone, that the worthy clergyman threw down the pen, started up and seized his hand, and gazing on him, exclaimed—

"Why, Hayhurst, my friend, what is the matter?"

"I do not know, sir, unless it is that I am going mad as fast as Dr. Horne."

"Why—what mean you, then?"

"I watched with him last night."

"You did? And the result? Tell me all about it. But first of all—here, take this chair," said the clergyman, indicating one that stood beside his own seat.

Mr. Hayhurst drew near, and dropped rather than seated himself in it.

"And now?" asked the pastor, eagerly.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"I watched with him last night, as I told you, sir. He laid down in his clothes on the outside of the bed. I sat in an easy chair beside him. I could not persuade him to undress, and get between the sheets; no, he said he could not until *she* had come and gone. We conversed but little, and that was in the early portion of the night.

"As the hours crept slowly by, the fire on the hearth, for want of replenishing, sank low; the little taper, in need of trimming, burned dimly; my companion lapsed into silence, and my own spirits fell to zero. I heard the clock strike *ten;* then, after a long, dull, tedious interval, *eleven;* then, perhaps, I dozed, for I did not hear it strike twelve, although it was just at that hour that I was horribly startled by hearing a low, long, wailing cry from the mouth of the man on the bed.

"Looking up, I saw Dr. Horne sitting on the bed, his face pale as death, his brow bathed in perspiration, his eyes strained out upon some object, to which his long arm and skeleton finger pointed.

"Following instantly the direction of his gaze and his finger, to my horror and amazement, I saw, as plainly as I see you now—will you believe me? shall I tell you?—the apparition of Alice Heath standing within the doorway. The image was clothed, not in the habiliments of the grave, but in the usual white dress worn in life; her pale face was cadaverous as that of an exhumed corpse; her wild, black locks straggled in disorder down upon her breast; her eyes were wide open, steady, frozen; her hand was raised to Heaven with an adjuring gesture.

"But my horror and amazement never reached its height, until those stony eyes fixed themselves upon the face of Dr. Horne, and, with her hand still raised to Heaven, her frozen lips parted with the one thrilling word—

"'CONFESS!'"

"At that word Dr. Horne sank back into a swoon, and the vision vanished."

Here Hayhurst paused, while Mr. Osborne gazed at him in silent astonishment, not unmixed with suspicion

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

and indignation, as a man might gaze upon a person who should dare to put his credulity to the severest test. Then speaking slowly, and keeping his eyes fixed upon the face of his visitor, he said—

"You saw the apparition of Alice Heath standing within the door of Dr. Horne's chamber last night at twelve o'clock?"

"By all my hopes of heaven, I did!" returned the other, withdrawing his gaze.

"Man—man—you fell asleep and dreamed the whole thing."

"Then Dr. Horne and myself dreamt the same dream precisely at the same hour!"

"You are mad!"

"That may well be. But if I am sane, as sure as I stand here before you, as sure as I speak in your presence, and am heard in heaven, I saw the form that I have described to you, last night at twelve o'clock, in the doorway of Dr. Horne's chamber," replied the visitor, with deep solemnity.

"And after the swoon of Dr. Horne and the disappearance of the vision, what happened?"

"Why as soon as I recovered the use of my limbs, and collected my scattered faculties, I went to the bedside, and sought to restore my friend to consciousness, not only for his own sake, but for mine, for it was terrible to be alone under such circumstances. But his swoon proved to be an obstinate one, and so, after working over him for some time in vain, I roused up the house servants.'

"And what construction did their plain, good sense put upon this affair?"

"They seemed more frightened than surprised. John, the doctor's valet, who had been accustomed to sleep in his master's room, told me, with chattering teeth, that this event happened every night."

"What event—his master's fit?"

"The vision of Alice and the deadly swoon of Dr. Horne; and when, by our united efforts, we called the doctor to his senses, with great mental distress he confirmed his servant's words."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Mr. Osborne shook his head slowly, with an air of incredulity.

"You do not believe it!" cried his visitor, with a look of pain.

"My friend," said Mr. Osborne, solemnly, "I have no doubt that you believe all that you tell me. I am convinced that you act and speak in perfect good faith; but, in a case where I should distrust the fidelity of my own senses, you must forgive me if I cannot credit those of others."

"Well, Mr. Osborne," said the farmer, with an humbled look, "I did not, Heaven knows, come out this stormy evening only to astonish you with a marvellous and incredible story. I came to seek your aid and counsel for a sorely-afflicted man, for whether you believe it or not, this prodigy occurs nightly, and is driving him mad!"

"Good neighbour, do not be angry with me. Certainly there is no need that I should assure you of my perfect faith in your truthfulness. But this of which you tell me is a case in which, as I said, I should doubt the evidence of my own eyes and ears. Such a prodigy could such really, possibly exist, should be witnessed, not by one man, or even by two, but by many at one and the same time, that each might have the witness of others, and that all might feel sure that no deception had been practised. As for Dr. Horne, he has behaved exceedingly ill in persecuting to death a young and probably innocent girl. I do not like the man, still it is our bounden duty, both for his sake and for the well-being of others, to do what we can to ascertain his real condition, with a view to his relief."

"That was my only motive, sir, for troubling you at all."

"Well, Mr. Hayhurst, for the present do not mention this to anyone. I will speak confidentially to Colonel North, who is a magistrate, and we will consult as to the best course to be pursued," said the clergyman, with something of the air of dismissing his visitor. The farmer so understood his manner, and arose to depart, saying—

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Well, sir, I will leave it to you, of course. Good night, sir."

"It should not be a good night, Hayhurst, if I were at leisure; but—look at this manuscript. I have a night's work before me, and cannot help it; but see here, Hayhurst, not a word below-stairs of the vision!" said Mr. Osborne, solemnly.

"Oh, no, sir, no; and I can only look in the kitchen and say 'How d'ye do' and 'Good-bye' before going." And with a cordial shake of the hands the two parted.

But the story that Mr. Osborne was so anxious to keep concealed got wind without the agency of Mr. Hayhurst. Dr. Horne, like a perturbed spirit, wandered over the neighbourhood, both by day and by night. And if, in his disturbed mood, he chanced to meet an acquaintance, he would be sure to stop and tell them of the awful spectre that visited his room at midnight. The house servants of Radnor also now spoke freely of these nightly prodigies. As the days passed, and that fixed upon for the execution of Gerald Mostyn drew near, it was observed that Dr. Horne's symptoms of mania became greatly aggravated.

It was about the middle of the week that Mr. Osborne at length went over to Llyndell, and requested an interview with Col. North.

Being shown into the library, where the colonel sat alone, the clergyman closed the door and took a seat, and then and there repeated to the magistrate all that he had been told of the reputed prodigies at Radnor. The old gentleman listened with grave attention, and at the close of the story said—

"I have for some time past regarded Dr. Horne as a subject of lunacy. I had heard the report to which you allude, but thought that the reputed 'vision' existed only in the diseased brain of a madman, and that what the master imagined the servants believed. Now, however, when you tell me that Farmer Hayhurst, an honest, truthful and practical man, believes that he also witnessed this prodigy, I have only to say that the whole thing is probably a piece of jugglery, got up by some enemy of Horne, for the torture of the poor,

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

solitary hypochondriac, and into which it is our duty to investigate. I propose therefore, that you, myself, and Mr. Hayhurst, as the three most interested, proceed to the house and watch through the night in his chamber. If this can be effected with perfect secrecy, so much the more likely shall we be to unmask the imposture. What think you of this plan?"

"It has my entire approbation. It is just what I myself should have proposed," said Mr. Osborne.

"We shall need the intervention of Mr. Hayhurst to obtain, if possible, the consent of Dr. Horne to our watching with him. Will you attend to that part of the business?" asked the colonel.

"With pleasure," answered the clergyman; "nor do I anticipate the least difficulty in obtaining Dr. Horne's ready concurrence in our plan. He seems rather anxious than otherwise for aid and comfort. All that we must guard against is wounding the self-love of the lunatic by appearing to make light of this illusion or imposture, as the case may be. I believe our interview is at an end now, sir?"

"Not if you will favour me with your company for the evening."

"Impossible. I must see Hayhurst this afternoon, to make the requisite arrangements with him."

"Then when shall I see you again on the subject?"

"Some time in the course of to-morrow," replied the pastor, grasping and cordially shaking the hand of his old parishioner. And they parted.

The same day, according to agreement, Mr. Osborne sought out Farmer Hayhurst, and opened to him the plan for investigating the mystery at Radnor. He found the way clearer than he could have anticipated.

"Sir," said the old man, "the time has arrived when the interference of friends and neighbours is imperatively necessary. Dr. Horne is no longer able to direct his own life. Since the final decision of the Minister in regard to Mr. Mostyn has been promulgated—since it is known beyond a doubt that there will be no second respite, and that the condemned man must suffer the extreme penalty of the law on Monday—Dr. Horne

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

has passed every hour in alternate raving and stupor. He calls himself a murderer. Sir, Heaven forgive us all! but I sometimes fear there may be more than mere mania in his raving."

"Strange—strange and terrible. We may be able to see, perhaps, the meaning of all this. Have you watched with him since that fatal night?"

"No, sir. Nor would I do it again alone for a mint of money. I will, however, very gladly join others in the duty."

"Do you think that there will be any difficulty in getting the doctor's consent to our doing so?"

"I repeat, sir, that the doctor is not in a condition to be consulted. I will go over on Friday, and remain there until you and your party arrive; and hold myself responsible for your being installed in the chamber of the patient. Will that do for you?"

"Perfectly, if you can really effect it."

"Certainly, I can and will. I hold myself bound to do it."

"Friday evening then, let it be. Good-bye until then."

"Good-bye, sir." And the friends separated, until they should meet the next night in the haunted chamber of the monomaniac.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A COMMITTEE OF INVESTIGATION.

THE morning of the day upon which the committee of neighbours was to visit Radnor and test the condition of the invalid there, Col. North sat in his study buried in deep thought. The old gentleman was not, through all his nature, the relentless judge which some of his acts might lead us to suppose. Proud conservator of rank he certainly was; and, as such, he had repulsed the pretensions of Gerald Mostyn, to

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

an alliance with his family. Stern denouncer of guilt he had shown himself to be upon the occasion of Mr. Mostyn's conviction. But if once a suspicion that he had acted with injustice towards a persecuted man insinuated itself into his mind, Col. North was not one to shun the investigation of the truth. Such a doubt now possessed his thoughts. Many little incidents connected with the history of Dr. Horne—incidents which, taken singly, were of little moment, but when combined, proved of great weight—now arranged themselves into a chain of probabilities, which raised in his mind grave suspicions of the doctor's integrity and startling doubts of the prisoner's guilt;—and these doubts and suspicions once inspired, were necessarily acted upon.

Col. North arose and rang the bell and ordered his horse to be saddled and brought to the door. Then he mounted, and rode rapidly to Gwyn, where Lord Starr was tarrying. On his arrival, he sought and obtained an interview with that Minister. Colonel North opened his business by saying, with a grave smile—

"Your lordship has doubtless been sufficiently annoyed with the subject of Gerald Mostyn, not to desire that topic renewed?"

The Minister replied by nodding and looking inquisitive.

"Nor should I trouble you to-day," the Col. proceeded, "had not grave doubts as to his criminality been forced on my mind. I have not come to petition for a further respite, which I understand has been refused."

"Yes, it has been," interrupted Lord Starr.

"Very well; but I am about to make a request of your lordship that you may consider a still more improper favour."

"Speak on, old friend, there is nothing in which I could serve you, that shall not be attended to," said Lord Starr.

"Your lordship has no doubt heard of the strange illness of my neighbour, Dr. Horne?" asked Col. North.

"Certainly."

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"And of the stranger rumours connected with his illness?"

"Yes," said the minister, with a puzzled look.

"Very well. To-night a committee of neighbours will assemble at his house and in his sick chamber, with a view to ascertain the nature and extent of the malady —as to whether and in what degree he may be remorseful or deranged."

"Yes?" inquired the Minister, with a look of interest.

"Well, I have an experiment to try. And I do entreat your lordship to believe that it is not impulsively, or without mature consideration, that I make the request which I am about to prefer, and which I fear you, sir, may consider as improper as it is unusual," said Colonel North, earnestly.

"Well, well, old friend, there need not be, to a request from you to me, so very much of preface and introduction! I feel sure that you could not make an improper one, and as for the rest, if it be in my power to grant it, I will do so, however unusual it may be!" said Lord Starr, heartily.

"Then, my lord, my petition is that your lordship will accompany the Rev. Mr. Osborne, myself, and others, to Radnor, and watch with us in the sick chamber of Doctor Horne, where I think some light may be thrown upon the guilt or innocence of young Mostyn," said the colonel.

"That is indeed an unprecedented request!" replied the Minister.

"It is drawn out by unprecedented exigency, sir."

"But on Monday, between nine and twelve, this man is to die."

"I know it; but there will be time enough to save him."

"This is a most extraordinary demand!" again cried his lordship.

"I repeat that it is forced from me by extraordinary necessity.

"And that necessity?"

"Will explain itself! at least so I hope and believe.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

I beg that your lordship will grant my petition and await the result."

"The interest you take in this young man is altogether a new one, Colonel North," said the Minister.

"The interest that I take is not in Gerald Mostyn, but in the cause of justice," replied the old gentleman.

Lord Starr looked down and mused for a few moments; then rising his head he exclaimed—

"Well I see nothing to prevent me making one of the committee—I will meet you there."

"I am deeply indebted to you, sir, for your promptness in granting a request which I trust that the result of this evening's visit will justify," replied the colonel, rising to take leave.

* * * * * *

That same afternoon, Gerald Mostyn and his devoted wife were alone together in his prison cell. They sat side by side upon the edge of the bedstead, with a little stand before them, upon which lay an open volume. They were engaged, as they had been for many days previous, in reading the Scriptures, and in prayer.

The long pressure of an almost insupportable weight of sorrow had so benumbed their faculties that now indeed they were scarcely conscious of the awfulness of their position. With what power of feeling paralysing grief had left her, Constance seemed to hope even 'against hope.' And blending with this feeling was a strange, but not unnatural desire—a desire that may not be understood by the happy, but will be easily comprehended by the miserable—it was, that all this troubled life were once well over, and the peace of the grave attained.

On Monday he must die; she should surely follow him; and then, by the grace of Heaven, would come rest—eternal rest; it was all they had to hope for; but was it not enough?

* * * * * *

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

The shadows of night gathered darkly over the face of the earth. Black clouds that had been mustering all the evening hung heavily upon the mountain's brow. All outward signs presaged an awful tempest.

In the gloomy mansion of Radnor, in a remote and darkened chamber, the remorseful master of the house lay writhing under the terrors of a guilty conscience.

He was attended by one awe-stricken old servant, whose superstitious fears struggled with his habits of fidelity, and tempted him to escape from the haunted chamber. Yes, *haunted!*—if not by the spectre of a murdered maiden, at least by guilty memories and remorseful terrors, most horrible to witness. But as often as poor John would creep to the door, his master, dreading to be left alone for a moment, commanded him to come back.

As John for the twentieth time returned to his station by the bedside, the blast passed over the house, echoed sullenly from the mountain caverns, and rolled away in the distance.

"What—what was that?" cried the guilty man, with suspended breath.

"Lord bless you, master; it is nothing but the wind," replied John.

"Wind? No; it was a voice—*her voice!* Listen again?" said the sufferer, starting up in bed, and bending forward towards the window on his right side, in an agony of attention.

"Bless you and save you, master, whose voice?" exclaimed the frightened servant.

"*Hers! hers! hers!*—and it calls for vengeance!"

"May the Lord help you, master; say your prayers, and try to compose your mind. It was not a voice—it was the rain and wind."

"I tell you that her perturbed spirit rides the storm, and speaks in the wind."

"Dear master, there is no troubled spirit except your own! Do, master, try to compose yourself, and say your prayers,"

At this moment a louder blast sounded through the mountain gorges, and the guilty man shrieked out—

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Close the shutters. Close them fast. She shall not enter here."

"She don't want to come, master. Lord deliver us, she don't want to come!" gasped the old man, shuddering, nevertheless, as he hurried to the windows—which were on the right side of the bed—and pulled in and secured the strong oaken shutters. Then he let fall the heavy moreen curtains, and having thus deafened the noise of the storm without, he returned to the side of his master.

The chamber was now quite dark, save for the low and smouldering wood-fire on the hearth, whose fitful flames flashed out a lurid light, and cast up weird leaping shadows on the walls and ceiling, projecting them in spasmodic starts over the bed of the sick man, who again sprang up, exclaiming—

"Mercy, mercy! The room is full of demons. Wretch—did you mean to drive me mad! Light the lamps to drive them away."

"Master, master!" cried the old servant, in extreme distress, "do, pray, be reasonable."

"Light the lamps, you villain!" screamed his master.

The terrified servant hastened to obey by applying a match to each of the old-fashioned lamps that garnished the ends of the mantel-piece, on the left side of the bed.

The lights falling across the figure of the sick man revealed a face ghastly in its pallor, haggard in its emaciation, horrible in its expression. His senses seemed preternaturally acute, for though the thick, oaken shutters, and heavy moreen curtains shut out all sound, yet ever and anon he started and listened, with his wild eyes glaring upon the windows, as if he still heard the voice of his victim in the storm. The clock struck nine. On hearing it, he started again, exclaiming—

"Hayhurst promised to come and stay with me to-night, but the storm keeps him back. Oh, Heaven——"

"Master, never you fear, now. No storm ever kept old Mr. Hayhurst away. There! what did I tell you? There's his knock now!" exclaimed the servant, starting

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

up with a grin on his face, overjoyed at the certainty of having a companion to share his weird night-watch.

"Admit him, admit him at once!" commanded his master, with eagerness in every tone and gesture.

The servant went and opened the door, and the farmer walked in and went up to the bedside of the patient, saying, kindly—

"I hope to find you better, sir?"

"Better! better! how can I be better, when *her* avenging spirit walks the earth and floats in the air?"

"Tut, tut, tut! sick fancies, sir."

"Sick fancies! You yourself both saw and heard her!"

"A dream! An optical illusion at the worst!"

"Optical illusion! I tell you I have not seen her yet this night, but she is even now shrieking and shaking at the windows to get in! Do you hear her?"

"I hear the waterfall roar and the wind rave; but even these sounds come muffled through your manifold defences."

"Ah! you hear *them*, but you do not hear *her* voice in them, as *I* do! You will stay with me to-night?"

"Certainly; I came for that purpose."

"Well, then, you do not *now* hear her spirit raving to get in, as *I* hear it; but at *midnight*, her time of power, you will see her enter this room, even as you saw her once before," said the guilty man, in a voice half-suffocated with horror.

"Doctor," said the farmer, sitting down on the bed beside him, "I won't dispute you. I saw, as you yourself said, *something* strange and unaccountable, in this very room, at midnight!"

"Yes! yes, yes, yes. You did! You own it!" ejaculated the sufferer, in a succession of gasps.

"Well, now, whether a ghost, devil, dream, or delusion, it is a terrible visitation for you to suffer, all alone, night after night."

"Terrible? Oh, *how* terrible, God only knows!"

"And you would like that the mystery should be thoroughly sifted and tested—as to whether the vision be really 'ghost, devil, dream, or delusion?'"

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"Yes, yes, yes, yes! but who shall do it!"

"A few of your good friends and neighbours, hearing of your condition, and feeling deeply interested in your welfare, have braved the storm this evening, to come hither and watch with you in your chamber, to investigate this affair."

"Who are they, who are they?" asked the patient, in doubt, fear, and suspicion.

"Colonel North, Mr. Maraudey, Mr. Osborne, and Lord Starr," answered the farmer.

"Let them come—yes, let them come! Let them see the spectre, or prove it to be a creation of my brain! I know there are optical illusions; I wish this, that is killing me, were one. But it is not! it cannot be! for you all saw it! and no two persons were ever at the same time the subject of the same visual illusion!"

"Now I do not *know* that! *that* remains to be proved! It may be catching, like gaping, you know; and I may have caught it from you. But—shall I invite our friends up?"

"Oh, yes, yes; in this case, indeed, there is safety in numbers," replied the sick man, who, even since the arrival of Mr. Hayhurst, had become much calmer.

The good farmer left the room for the indicated purpose.

After the lapse of about fifteen minutes he returned, accompanied by Lord Starr, Mr. Osborne, Mr. Maraudey, and Colonel North, the last-mentioned of whom entered, muttering—

"We form a very grave and respectable committee on the ghost question, do we not?"

The gentlemen approached the bedside of the invalid, who quietly thanked them for their visit, and calmly replied to their questions in regard to his health.

"Why, he seems as sensible as any man," whispered Colonel North, in surprise, to Mr. Hayhurst.

"A re-action from excitement, sir; a lucid interval, nothing better; you will see something very different before the night is past," replied the farmer, in the same low voice.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

CHAPTER XLVIII.

CONFESSION OF DR. HORNE—THE INNOCENT LIBERATED.

THE visitors were then accommodated with seats on the right of the patient, in the space between the bed and the front windows, and with their faces in the direction of the door, which was just opposite to the foot of the bed.

I am thus particular in describing the relative position of the room and its occupants that the reader may better understand the spectacle that afterwards presented itself.

While the gentlemen sat there, they sought, by quiet conversation, to soothe the spirits of the sick man. And the patient had struggled successfully for self-control, he sustained with composure his own part of the discussion; admitting that the visitation to which he was nightly subjected might be either an imposture or an optical illusion; but confessing that in the present shattered condition of his health he had not nerve enough, at the hour of its arrival, to investigate the true nature of the apparition.

Thus rationally and composedly he conversed until the clock struck ten, when he started, shuddered, and sank into silence.

A gloomy silence and a semi-darkness prevailed. The lamps, for want of trimming, burned dimly; the fire had nearly died out; the visitors, under some depressing spell, had ceased to converse; and the patient had sunk into a half-stupid state.

Thus they remained until the clock struck eleven. At the sound the man upon the bed shivered through his whole frame, half started, and then fell back and relapsed into stupor.

The next hour was one of intense anxiety—almost of suspended animation—to the watchers in the chamber. As the minute-hand of the mantel-clock crept its weary

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

round, the very ticking of the pendulum sounded preternaturally loud and ominous.

Without the storm had raged itself to rest.

Within, the watchers had dropped into total silence; the fire was entirely out; the lamps were burning with long wicks, and red, lurid flames, that only served to make 'darkness visible.'

The watchers waited in total silence and with almost breathless interest. What would be the issue of this midnight vigil? Would the apparition, so well attested by Mr. Hayhurst, again make its appearance? Would it prove to be an imposture that they could examine, handle, and unmask; or an optical illusion, visible only to the sick brain of a credulous man? or would it be—? Who could tell?

Suddenly, out of the deep silence, the clock commenced to strike. Between it and the sufferer on the bed there seemed to be an electric connection, for, with its first vibrating stroke, again his frame shivered from head to foot, though he did not as yet awake; but at each slow, successive stroke, his form shuddered as under the charge of a galvanic battery.

As the last stroke of twelve rang solemnly through the darkening room, he suddenly sprang up in a sitting posture, broad awake, with his long arms extended, and his glaring eyes fixed upon the closed door at the foot of the bed. His frame was no longer convulsed, but rigid as marble; his face was livid as that of a corpse; his mouth was open; his eyes almost bursting from their sockets; great drops of sweat started from his pallid brow, from which his dark hair bristled up with horror.

"This is a fit," whispered Colonel North to Mr. Osborne, as they gazed in consternation upon the sufferer; and both cautiously arose to go to his assistance, while Mr. Maraudey from the other side of the bed earnestly motioned them to keep still and wait the issue. Yielding to the greater knowledge and experience of the old man, the other gentlemen silently resumed their seats and watched the patient, from

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

whose white and rigid lips low and almost inarticulate sounds were bursting.

"She is coming! She is coming! Do you not hear her?"

They listened intently, but heard nothing except the laboured breathing of the stricken man.

"Hark! She is here! She is here!" he gasped once more.

Again they listened and looked, but now no new sound or sight broke the stillness of the room.

"She is here! She is here! On the outside of the door!"

They looked, but the door remained quietly closed as before.

Once more they arose to approach the dying man, but the priest lifted his hand with a gesture and a look that said, "For Heaven's sake be quiet!" and they relapsed into stillness.

"*There! there she is now!*" shrieked the guilty man, extending his skeleton finger and fixing his startling eyes upon the door. "Look! behold! see her! she has come to force me to confess!"

The eyes of all present followed the index of that ghastly finger, and, to their horror and amazement, they beheld—like a moonbeam in the darkness of the doorway—

The shape or shade of Alice Heath, palpable to sense as ever she appeared while living! only never living woman looked so coldly pure. Her long and flowing snow-white robe was not whiter than her still face; her fair, slender hands were crossed upon her spotless bosom; her long black hair, parted over her calm brow, flowed gracefully down upon her white drapery; her eyes were fixed in sadness upon the eyes of her destroyer, which they seemed to hold by irresistible power, magnetized to her own.

While the gaze of the watchers was yet, as it were, frozen to this awful vision, the voice of the dying man arose in shrieks—

"You see her—you all see her? It is no illusion, as

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

they said it was! You see her! you all see her as plainly as I do, don't you?"

The appalled faces of the spectators avouched as strongly as words could speak that they did.

"She has come to me!" screamed the convulsed and agonized man—"she has come to me! she has come to me for justice! She will have justice! Well, she shall have it! Ha! who is that behind her? Is it the old man? What, he, too? Look! look where the dark shadow of a man stands and shakes his hand on high. Look! behold, I say!"

The watchers followed his horrid gaze, and saw only the apparition of Alice Heath, which stood still, pale, and luminous as a form of moonlight in the doorway.

"Ha! the wound across his throat has broken out afresh! I know now it is that which makes him look so pale. How it streams with blood—how it streams! It is running down his garments! It is creeping over the floor, and curdling in pools; take care! keep out of it! or they will find the stain upon you, and say you murdered him. Away, old man, back to your grave! Why should you stretch your withered hand towards me, as if you thought I did it? You said in dying—it was Mostyn!"

"Oh, this is horrible!" said Mr. Osborne, shuddering.

Through all this raving the vision of Alice Heath remained in unaltered beauty. But now, behold a new wonder—her perfect lips parted as if an angel spoke by them in the single phrase—

"Confess and be forgiven!"

"Oh, I will—I will! You shall have justice, Alice, you and him! him also! for death is less dreadful than this horrible punishment. Hear, all men! I murdered the old man for his hoarded gold. I put on the clothes of Gerald Mostyn, not to criminate him, but to save my own garments from bloodstain, when I did the deed. I hid the clothes with the stolen will in the crevice of the rock, meaning to produce the will when it should seem safe to do so——"

"My God! my God! I thank Thee for this great

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

deliverance!" ejaculated Mr. Osborne, in strong emotion, while Colonel North convulsively clasped his hand.

"Ha, you are satisfied now, old man?" cried the dying penitent, still addressing the unreal phantom of his own brain, "are you satisfied now? Yes! See, see, he raises his venerable hands to heaven! He bows his hoary head in token of assent—do you not note it?"

No; the amazed spectators saw nothing but a dark form lurking behind the fair, luminous vision of Alice Heath and the dying figure of her destroyer—heard nothing but the astounding confession that criminated himself and cleared the fame of Gerald Mostyn.

"There, he extends his reverend hands in benediction, and now he is gone! he is gone!" cried the sufferer gazing into vacancy; then suddenly bringing down his wild eyes, he settled them upon the fair vision that remained unchanged and visible to all, as to himself, and cried—

"Ha, Alice, you here still? So, I forget! You must have justice, too! Ah, how dark it grows—how thick the air—great Heaven! can this be death? Alice, you shall have justice!—give me time, Heaven! Alice is innocent—I—I put the jewels in her trunk—to get her in my power—I—I did not mean that she should go to prison—but I could not stop the course of law!—Alice—forgive—Jesus plead—God pardon——"

The grayness of dissolution crept over the face of the dying man; his rigid form relaxed, and he fell back upon his pillow—DEAD.

Before either of the watchers could make a step towards the bed, their attention was startled by a new prodigy.

The fair spirit that had remained all this while unchanged, suddenly dropped her clasped hands, and fell, fainting as a living woman might fall, into the outstretched arms of Francis Heath, who sprang forward to receive her.

He raised and bore, not the shade, but the real living form of Alice Heath, to the lounge, upon which he tenderly laid her.

All was in an instant confusion, though the presence

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

of the dead, and, perhaps, of the dying, restrained noisy demonstrations.

Dr. Heath bent anxiously over the insensible form of his bride, who, under his skilful treatment, soon breathed again, opened her sweet eyes, and looked around in surprise and fear.

"Be calm, dear one; there is no more need of concealment. Trust me, and lie quietly, while I give our friends here one word of explanation," said Francis Heath arranging her pillow. And then turning to the astonished and wondering spectators, he said—

"Gentlemen, a few words will explain this seeming prodigy. The apparent death of Alice in the prison, was a severe attack of catalepsy, brought on by her previous excessive suffering. When her body was given up to me for burial, I watched beside her coffin all night in my study. A little after midnight I discovered in the supposed corpse signs of life.

"In a delirium of newly-inspired hope, I lifted her from the coffin and carried her to bed, used all proper remedies, and after an hour of anxious effort, I succeeded in restoring her to consciousness. I filled her empty coffin with a muffled log, and screwed down the lid to avoid detection.

"There was a mock funeral, in that case a pious fraud, if such a thing could be.

"The next night I conveyed Alice to a safe retreat in the mountains, where I thought she would remain in peace, until I could find means to carry her to a foreign country.

"But her shattered nervous system could not soon be restored to health. Her nervous fits returned, attended with the alarming feature of somnambulism. Despite my greatest precaution, and during the time of my necessary absence, she frequently arose and walked in her sleep.

"At such seasons, the one idea of her life—the clearing of her fame—seemed to be the motive power of her unconscious action. This involuntary impulse no doubt it was that led her, night after night, to the chamber of her persecutor.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

"I need not tell you, however, that while asleep, Alice is totally unconscious, and wholly irresponsible for her actions; that when awake she has no recollection of anything that has passed during her state of somnambulency, and that at this moment she is perfectly ignorant of the momentous events that have just occurred in this chamber, and to which she has been so important a party."

Then turning to Lord Starr, the young man bowed with great deference and continued—

"And I would now most respectfully suggest to the Minister, that in view of all he has heard and seen to-night, his lordship can no longer hesitate as to his course in regard to two guiltless individuals most unjustly convicted."

Lord Starr bowed stiffly, with the air of one who did not choose to be prompted, and after a short delay, he arose, requested Colonel North and Mr. Osborne to attend him, and beckoned John to show him into the library, where he could be supplied with lights and writing materials.

Francis Heath seated himself beside the couch of his young wife, who, under his soothing hands, had sunk into a sweet, natural sleep.

The Catholic priest, Maraudey, knelt at the foot of the bed to pray for the soul of the departed, while Farmer Hayhurst, standing on the right side, closed the eyes, tied up the chin, and straightened the limbs of the body.

The next morning Lord Starr, attended by Colonel North, set out for London. As soon as the two pardons could pass the seals of office, they were entrusted to Colonel North, who instantly took the express train down to Gwyn, hurried at once to the house of the sheriff, and placed the documents in his hands.

That same day Gerald and Constance, who had heard from their friend Francis Heath an account of the events that had transpired at Radnor, sat side by side in the prison cell, with their hands clasped

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

together, and their hearts filled with solemn gratitude for their own deliverance from deep affliction, but not unmixed with compassion for the sinful soul now gone to its last tremendous account.

Thus in silence they remained, until the door was opened by the sheriff, who entered, bearing a document, whose import might easily be surmised, and which had been placed in his hands by Colonel North.

After a cursory examination of the papers, the worthy officer, cordially offering his hand to his prisoner, said—

"I am happy to announce, sir, that my official relations with you are ended. Permit me to wish you much happiness in the renewed life so justly bestowed upon you."

Mr. Mostyn bowed gravely and silently, his heart being too full for speech.

"Gerald!" cried Constance, in a thrilling voice, droppiug her head upon his shoulder; but for her sovereign self-control she must have fainted.

"Cheer up, madam! You have borne affliction bravely! Surely you can bear joy," said the sheriff. Then turning to Mr. Mostyn, he added—

"A carriage, sent by Colonel North, waits to convey you from the prison, sir. And the colonel desires me to request you to proceed at once to Radnor, whither he himself has gone, and where, he says, he prefers to meet you."'

Mr. Mostyn, accompanied by his wife, immediately left the prison, entered the carriage, and set out for Radnor. They were met in the hall by their pastor, who cordially shook hands with both, and offered them refreshments.

"I have now to inform you, my friends, that Colonel North prays the presence of his niece and nephew in the library," said Mr. Osborne, with a grave smile, waving his hand towards the door.

"Come, dear Constance," said Mr. Mostyn, drawing

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

the arm of his wife within his own, and following the clergyman, who led the way from the room.

They crossed the hall, and entered the sumptuous library that was situated on the same floor.

There they found Colonel North seated alone at the writing-table.

As they entered, the old gentleman arose and advanced towards them, holding out both his hands; grasping in each a hand of theirs, he said, in deep emotion—

"Gerald—Constance—I can scarcely hope that you will pardon me, for that I also yielded credence to the circumstantial evidence that convicted an innocent man. It will take time to prove to you how deeply I regret that error."

"An error shared by the judge, the jury, and the country, sir. We could scarcely expect you to be wiser than all," replied Mr. Mostyn, gravely.

"And you pardon me?" said the old man, squeezing his hand; then turning to his niece, he inquired—

"And you, Constance?"

"Uncle, I love you," replied the sweet-lipped lady.

"See," said the old gentleman, in a lightened tone, as he turned to the centre table, "I have lost no time in doing something to atone for my involuntary injustice," and taking up a document, he placed it in the hands of Gerald Mostyn, saying—

"There is an instrument of writing, Mr. Mostyn, that will put your wife in immediate possession of her fortune."

Gerald, with a grave and silent bow, received the papers.

"Let me also remind you, Mr. Mostyn, that, as heir-at-law both of your late grandfather and your just departed relative, you stand once more in the home of your fathers—the undisputed master of Radnor."

Gerald Mostyn started. It really had not occurred

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

to him that he had entered upon his patrimonial estate. Now a flush of pleasure overspread his fine face.

Constance, keenly sympathising with him, now in joy as once in sorrow, clasped his hand and smiled up into his face.

"Let me also congratulate you, my friends," said Mr. Osborne, "not on your restored fortune, but on your vindicated honour."

"Congratulate me," said Gerald Mostyn, in a deep and thrilling tone, as he took the hand of his wife, and turned upon her lovely face a look of immortal love, "congratulate me upon something surer than the riches that may 'take to themselves wings and fly away,' purer than the worldly honour that the breath of an insensate multitude may give or withdraw; congratulate me on her whose 'price is above rubies,' who alone of all the world remained true to me in the hour of my utmost need, whose faith never failed me in the darkest of days—my Constance, my bride of one morning, my wife for all eternity; above all goods congratulate me for her, as, above all blessings, for her I most thank God."

W. NICHOLSON AND SONS, PRINTERS, WAKEFIELD.

Digitized by Google Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

NEW TWO SHILLING SERIES.

Uniformly and Elegantly Bound in Cloth, Gilt Back and Side, with Frontispiece. Crown 8vo.

Remarkably Interesting Books. 2s. each.

BY REV. J. INGRAHAM. L.L.D.

THE PILLAR OF FIRE; or, Israel in Bondage.

"The central figure of this book is Moses. It takes up the Hebraic history at the time of the sale of Joseph into Egypt, and closes it with the promulgation of the Two Tables of the Divine Law from Sinai.

THE THRONE OF DAVID; from the Consecration of the Shepherd of Bethlehem to the Rebellion of Prince Absalom.

This is an attempt to illustrate the grandeur of Hebraic history, when "The People of God" had attained under the reigns of David and Solomon, the height of their power and glory as a nation.

THE PRINCE OF THE HOUSE OF DAVID; or Three Years in the Holy City. Relating the Scenes in the Life of Jesus of Nazareth.

The Third Book of the Series. "The Prince of the House of David," illustrates the *decadence* of Hebraic power, as "The Pillar of Fire" unfolds its *beginning;* while its final *culmination* is presented in "The Throne of David." The central figure of "The Prince of the House of David," is JESUS the "Son of David," our most blessed Lord and Saviour. The time of that work embraces a period about four years from the appearing of John the Baptist to the ascension of our Lord.

NAOMI; or the Last Days of Jerusalem. BY MRS. WEBB.

The terrible trials and sufferings of the Jews during the long siege of Jerusalem, and the trust and faith of Naomi amidst it all are graphically described by the talented authoress. It is a most interesting work. 2s. each.

BEN-HUR: A Tale of the Christ. BY LEW WALLACE.

BUNYAN'S PILGRIM'S PROGRESS. In Three Parts with Notes. 2s. each.

The HAND BOOK, or COMPANION to the BIBLE.

Designed to Exhibit the Truth and Excellencies of the Sacred Volume, and to direct the mind to a clear understanding, and a right appreciation of the Word of God. By W. NICHOLSON. 2s. 6d.

HOW TO BE A MAN, A Book for Boys and Young Men.

Published by W. NICHOLSON & SONS,
26, Paternoster Square, LONDON, E.C., and Albion Works, Wakefield.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

MRS. BENNETT'S WORKS. 2s. each. COMPLETE EDITIONS.

JANE SHORE; or, the Goldsmith's Wife.

THE COTTAGE GIRL; or, the Marriage Day.

THE JEW'S DAUGHTER; or, the Witch of the Water-Side.

THE BROKEN HEART: or the Village Bridal.

THE GIPSY BRIDE; or, the Miser's Daughter.

THE GIPSY QUEEN; or, the Maori's Daughter.

THE CANADIAN GIRL; or, the Pirate of the Lakes.

CHARLES DICKENS' WORKS. Complete.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY, Life and Adventures of 576 pages, **2s.** Illustrated. **2s. 6d.**

PICKWICK PAPERS. Crown 8vo. 448 pages. **2s.**

OLIVER TWIST, The Adventures of. Illustrated. **2s.**

SKETCHES BY "BOZ." Crown 8vo. Illustrated. **2s.**

THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP — MASTER HUMPHREY'S CLOCK. 2s.

BARNABY RUDGE; a Tale of the Riots of 'Eighty. **2s.**

MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT. 2s.

DOMBEY AND SON. 2s.

DAVID COPPERFIELD.—Personal History of **2s.**

BLEAK HOUSE. 2s.

THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH. 2s.

MEMOIRS of JOSEPH GRIMALDI. Price **1s.**

Published by W. NICHOLSON & SONS,
26, Paternoster Square, LONDON, E.C., and Albion Works, Wakefield.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

NEW TWO SHILLING SERIES, (CONTINUED.)

MRS. MARY JANE HOLMES'S WORKS. 2s. each.

EDNA BROWNING; or, the Leighton Homestead.
EDITH LYLE.
NINA; or, Darkness and Daylight.
DORA FREEMAN; or West Lawn.
FORREST HOUSE.
DAISY THORNTON and JESSIE GRAHAM.
MILLBANK: or Roger Irving's Ward.
THE CAMERON PRIDE; or Purified by Suffering.
THE STORY OF MILDRED; with the Starry Eyes.
MARIAN GREY.
GRETCHEN. Very Interesting. *New.*
BESSIE'S FORTUNE. "A delightful new book by Mrs. Holmes, one of the best she has ever written."

"Mrs. Holmes' stories are universally read. Her admirers are numberless. She is in many respects without a rival in the world of fiction. Her characters are always life-like, and she makes them talk and act like human beings, subject to the same emotions, swayed by the same motives which are common among men and women of every day existence. Mrs. Holmes is very happy in portraying domestic life. Old and young peruse her stories with great delight, for she writes in a style that all can comprehend."—*New York Weekly.*

By Mrs. SOUTHWORTH.

THE CHANGED BRIDES. By Mrs. Southworth.
THE BRIDE'S FATE, a Sequel to 'The Changed Brides.'
THE FATAL MARRIAGE. By Mrs. Southworth.
THE BRIDAL EVE. By Mrs. Southworth.
WINNY DARLING; Or, the Three Beauties of Shannondale.
THE BRIDE OF AN EVENING. By Mrs. Southworth.
THE LOST HEIRESS.
FAIR PLAY; or, The Test of the Lone Island.
HOW HE WON HER. A Sequel to Fair Play.

Published by W. NICHOLSON & SONS,
26, Paternoster Square, LONDON, E.C., and Albion Works, Wakefield.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

NEW TWO SHILLING SERIES, (CONTINUED.)

MRS. AUGUSTA J. E. WILSON'S POPULAR WORKS. 2s. each.

INFELICE; or, the Deserted Wife.
ST. ELMO; or, Saved at Last.
BEULAH.
MACARIA; or, Altars of Sacrifice.
VASHTI; Or, Until Death us do Part.
INEZ: A Tale of the Alamo.
AT THE MERCY OF TIBERIUS. (*Newest*)

"Who has not read with rare delight the Works of AUGUSTA WILSON? Her strange wonderful, and fascinating style; the profoundest depths to which she sinks the probe into human nature touching its most sacred chords and springs; the intense interest thrown around her characters, and the very marked peculiarities of her principal figures, conspire to give an unusual interest to the Works of this eminent Southern Authoress.

WORKS BY CAPTAIN MARRYAT. 2s. each.

PETER SIMPLE.
JACOB FAITHFUL.
THE POACHER.
THE KING'S OWN.

By E. WETHERELL.

THE WIDE, WIDE WORLD. By E. WETHERELL.
QUEECHY. By E. WETHERELL.
PINE NEEDLES and OLD YARNS. By E. WETHERELL.
MELBOURNE HOUSE. By E. WETHERELL.
DAISY. By Author of 'Wide, Wide World.'

2s. each. JOHN HARTLEY'S WORKS, Author of the "Clock Almanack."

A SHEAF from the MOORLAND.
MANY A SLIP. A Domestic Romance.

"This is a work of great interest, and with the exception of one comical character, is free from dialectism. The author has evidently worked out the romance in such a skilful manner, that it cannot fail to rivet the attention of the reader."

ROLLING STONE. A Tale of Wrongs and Revenge.

"'Rolling Stone' is a Tale of Moorland Love, founded on life among the Yorkshire Hills, the interest of the tale commences at once and is well sustained throughout.

Published by W. NICHOLSON & SONS,
26, Paternoster Square, LONDON, E.C., and Albion Works, Wakefield.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

BULWER-LYTTON'S WORKS 2s. each.

EUGENE ARAM. A Tale.
ERNEST MALTRAVERS.
ALICE; or, The Mysteries. Sequel to "Ernest Maltravers."
RIENZI; The Last of the Tribunes.
THE LAST DAYS OF POMPEII.
PAUL CLIFFORD.
PELHAM; Or, the Adventures of a Gentleman.
THE DISOWNED.
NIGHT AND MORNING.
ZANONI.

By SIR WALTER SCOTT.

IVANHOE.
GUY MANNERING.
THE ANTIQUARY.
OLD MORTALITY.
THE HEART OF MIDLOTHIAN.
KENILWORTH.
ROB ROY.
THE BRIDE OF LAMMERMOOR.
WAVERLEY; or 'tis Sixty Years since.

WORKS BY M. A. FLEMING.

CARRIED BY STORM: or Sleaford's Joanna.
THE MIDNIGHT QUEEN.
THE ACTRESS' DAUGHTER.
THE QUEEN OF THE ISLE.

"Four deeply interesting and exciting new novels."

By GRACE AGUILAR.

HOME INFLUENCE. A Tale for Mothers and Daughters.
MOTHER'S RECOMPENSE. Sequel to 'Home Influence.'
THE DAYS OF BRUCE.
THE VALE OF CEDARS.

Published by W. NICHOLSON & SONS.
25, Paternoster Square, LONDON, E.C., and Albion Works, Wakefield.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

By the BRONTE FAMILY.

SHIRLEY. By CHARLOTTE BRONTE.

JANE EYRE. By CHARLOTTE BRONTE.

JANE EYRE.—"A masculine vigor and originality pervade the work. This individuality of character and description constitutes the attraction and the value of the novel. The scenes are drawn with piquancy and power."

THE TENANT OF WILDFELL HALL. A. BRONTE.

WUTHERING HEIGHTS, AND AGNES GREY.

VILLETTE. By CHARLOTTE BRONTE.

MARY BARTON. By MRS. GASKELL.

T. S. ARTHUR'S WORKS. 2s. each.

HEART HISTORIES and LIFE PICTURES.
"They are thrilling histories, proving that "truth is stranger than fiction."

ANNA LEE; the Maiden, the Wife, and the Mother. Stories for my Young Countrywomen.

TEN NIGHTS IN A BAR-ROOM, and Three Nights with the Washingtonians. By T. S. ARTHUR.

WORKS BY THOMAS MILLER. 2s. each.

GIDEON GILES the ROPER.

FAIR ROSAMOND; or, the Days of King Henry II.

LADY JANE GREY. An Historical Romance.

ROYSTON GOWER; or, the Days of King John.

E. P. ROE'S WORKS. 2s. each.

FROM JEST TO EARNEST.

BARRIERS BURNED AWAY.

A KNIGHT of the NINETEENTH CENTURY.

WITHOUT A HOME.

OPENING A CHESTNUT BURR.

CONINGSBY. By LORD BEACONSFIELD.

JESSAMINE. By MARION HARLAND.

EMMA. By JANE AUSTEN.

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY. By JANE AUSTEN.

FOXE'S BOOK OF MARTYRS.

BEYOND PARDON. By BERTHA M. CLAY.

Published by W. NICHOLSON & SONS,
28, Paternoster Square, LONDON, E.C., and Albion Works, Wakefield.

Digitized by Google
Original from UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

Digitized by Google
Original from
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN